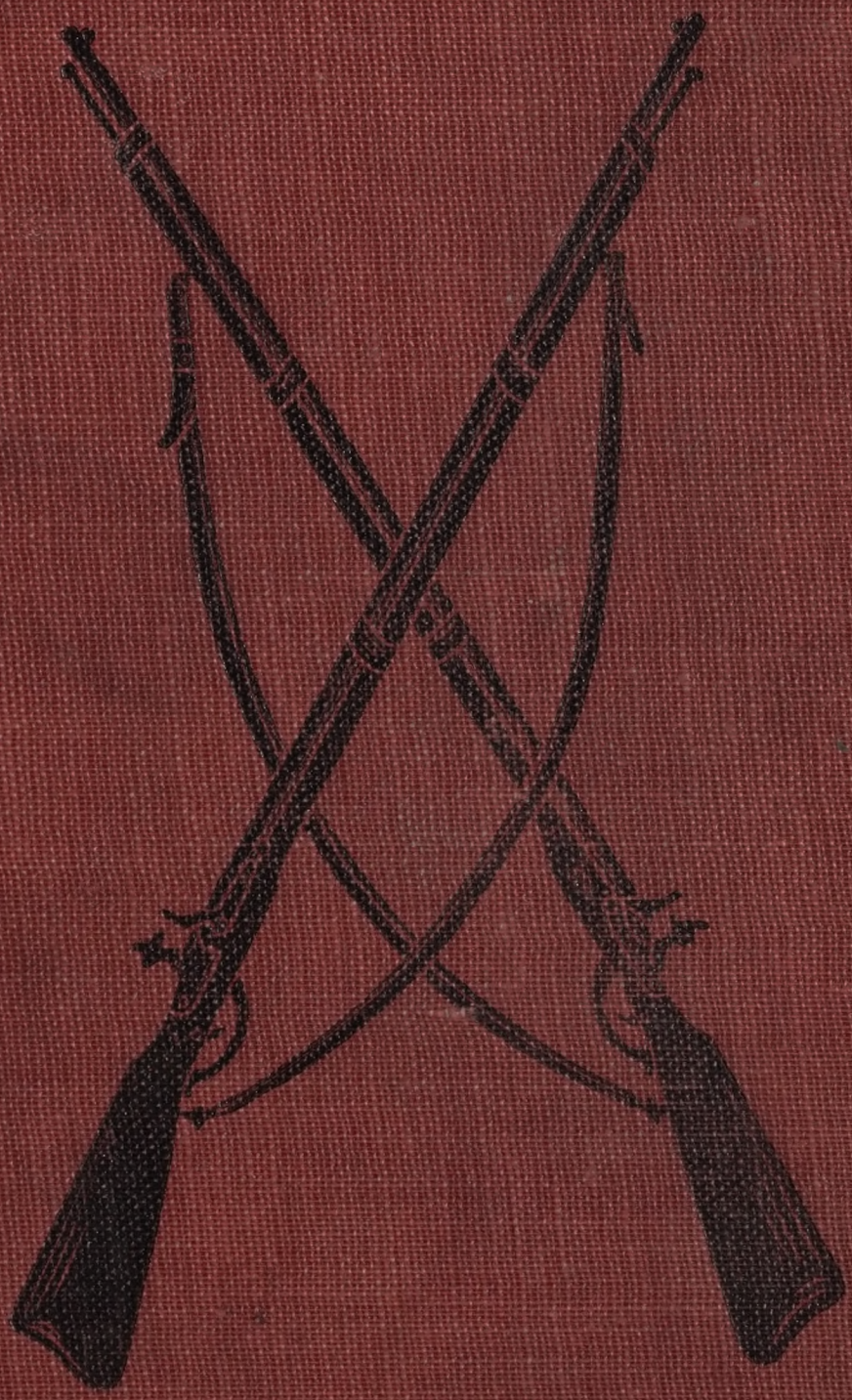
THE MYSTERIOUS RIFLEMAN



EVERETT T. TOMLINSON

THE MYSTERIOUS RIFLEMAN

By

EVERETT T. TOMLINSON

The Mysterious Rifleman

Scouting on the Border

The Pursuit of the
Apache Chief

The Trail of the
Mohawk Chief

Young People's History of the
American Revolution

Places Young Americans
Want to Know

Fighters Young Americans
Want to Know

The Story of General Pershing

D. APPLETON & COMPANY
Publishers **New York**

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"TAKE THEIR GUNS!" ORDERED THE COLONEL

[PAGE 199]

AMERICAN SCOUTING SERIES

THE MYSTERIOUS RIFLEMAN

A STORY OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

BY

EVERETT T. TOMLINSON

AUTHOR OF "SCOUTING ON THE BORDER," "THE PURSUIT OF THE APACHE CHIEF," "THE TRAIL OF THE MOHAWK CHIEF," "PLACES YOUNG AMERICANS WANT TO KNOW," "YOUNG PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION," ETC.

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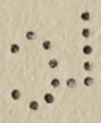

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PREFACE

The incidents incorporated in this tale are historically correct. The license of a story-teller has been used freely, but the main events are true. The writer has endeavored to interest his young readers not only in the story but also in the times which surrounded it. In these troubled days he has believed that any portrayal of the heroic deeds of the men who struggled to obtain the liberty we enjoy today was well worth while. When the newcomers to our shores learn the price that was paid for the freedom into which they have been received it may be that they will more truly value the land to which they have come. For those whose families for generations have been Americans the story of the fathers' heroism ought to make the younger Americans resolve to do their utmost to hold up what their ancestors so bravely upheld. At least all this has been in the mind of the writer as he has been at work. If the book shall interest his readers and they shall perceive his object, then his labor will not have been in vain.

Everett T. Tomlinson

Elizabeth, New Jersey

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THE MYSTERIOUS RIFLEMAN

CHAPTER I

A GREAT SNAKE

THE July sun was intensely warm. The leaves of the weeds along the dusty path were warped and curled beneath the summer sun. A heavy coating of dust rested over all inanimate things. Metallic sounds of the noisy insects alone broke in upon the stillness. A long, fat snake lay outstretched in the burning sand across the path or rough roadway that led through the wood, and, aside from the cloud of flies that were in a continuous motion which was so swift that to the eyes of a beholder they seemed to be motionless in the heated air, was the only visible living object until Jim Paget unexpectedly came within sight as he slowly turned the bend in the road and drew near the open space where the snake was lying, up to this time undisturbed.

The sight of the reptile caused Jim to stop abruptly. Cautiously he placed his string of fish upon the ground and then glanced about for a weapon of some kind. A sturdy branch of a fallen oak commended itself, and, still moving with

extreme caution after he dropped his pole near the fish, Jim broke off a length of eight or ten feet, which he tested carefully, meanwhile watching the snake which had not moved since he first discovered its presence.

Armed in this manner, Jim cautiously advanced upon the enemy. Like many boys, Jim Paget believed all snakes were created to be killed. Had not a snake talked to Eve in the Garden? Were they not "cursed things," condemned to crawl upon their bellies? Had not his grandmother told him that the Lord had told Adam to use his heel on a snake after the troublous times in Eden had been succeeded by days in which poor Adam had been condemned to work and even to sweat in his labors?

As Jim recalled the tales which Grandma Paget had told him of the early days of creation, none had found a deeper response than the one which dealt with the serpent's beguiling of Eve and thereby ushering in a time when man (and incidentally boys who were "the sons of men") were compelled to earn their bread by the sweat of their brows. Jim much preferred fishing in the North Branch of the Cape Fear River. It is true the Branch was a good long walk from his house and his face was as wet and shining with perspiration when he at last arrived at the place where he kept his canoe hidden, as when he reluctantly hoed the garden or with leaden feet went every afternoon to search for and drive home the

lone cow which now comprised the "herd" of Colonel Bludworth. And snakes had been the original cause of trouble. Therefore, all snakes were hateful and to be killed whenever seen.

Even the stories told him by his grandmother, however, were banished from his mind as Jim, a stout oak club in his right hand, advanced upon his unsuspecting enemy. The noisy drone of the insects continued and the apparently stationary flies were not alarmed as he passed. And all the time the serpent, doubtless a direct descendant of the one which had tempted Mother Eve and thereby brought death and all other woes to mortals, had not wriggled nor manifested any signs of fear.

As Jim drew near, the snake suddenly showed signs of alarm. It began lazily to crawl from its warm bed in the sand, evidently heading for the safety of the near-by brush. The boy instantly began to run, prepared to strike a heavy blow upon his enemy. The snake, at least six feet in length, hesitated. For a moment Jim believed it was about to give battle as it lifted its hissing head and darted, lightninglike, its forked tongue in a manner at once terrifying and amusing.

Jim, however, found no cause for amusement in the wide-open jaws and the gleaming little eyes that were shining like beads. As he halted a moment the snake leisurely resumed its flight, although it did not display any signs of undue alarm.

Jim promptly decided that he must lose no time if he wished to prevent the escape of his foe. Resolutely he darted forward, and, stepping cautiously to one side, he brought his club down upon the back of his enemy. Immediately the snake was aroused; instantly the six feet of squirming life was in action. Like an animated cable it tied itself into knots and then as quickly untied and was extended at full length, only to repeat the operation with a rapidity that was so marvelous that at no time did the snake appear to be motionless.

"Broke his back," muttered Jim as he prepared for a fresh attack.

Rushing upon his disabled foe, he soon was convinced that his repeated blows had rendered his helpless enemy lifeless.

Assured that he had nothing more to fear, Jim Paget thrust his club under the shining, slimy mass, lifting and letting fall again the heavy folds.

"Huh! It's nothing but a water snake," he exclaimed in disgust. "It's a whopper, though. I'll bet it's as big around as my leg. I wish Tim was here to see it. He's always talking about the big feller he killed down in the swamp near Nigger Head Point. He wouldn't own up that this one is as big as the one he killed, not even if he was here to measure it." At the suggestion Jim cautiously estimated the length of his victim. "Six foot, if he's an inch," he declared triumphantly.

"If he'd stop wiggling his tail long enough for me to cut it off, I'd just take it back for Tim to see. He'd stop braggin' about his wonderful snake then, I reckon! Anyway, I'm glad it won't do any more harm," said Jim philosophically, as he began to move toward the fish he had left on the near-by turf.

Just as Jim was about to pick up his string, he paused abruptly and glanced hastily into the rough roadway behind him. Some one was approaching. Jim waited and in a brief time saw Tim Bludworth emerging from the woods.

The approaching boy was two years older than Jim, a strapping, sturdy, well-grown lad of seventeen. A broken straw hat covered his head; he was coatless and barefooted. His freckled face and easy-going movements indicated his complete good nature, and it was plain that Tim was what his friends declared him to be, "a chip of the old block," for Colonel Bludworth, Tim's father, was a large man, more fond of hunting than of work on his small plantation, or "place," as his farm was often called.

It was now the summer of 1781, and the struggle between the poorly equipped army of General Nathanael Greene and the regulars of Lord Cornwallis was in full swing in North Carolina. It is true that in nearly every engagement between the opposing forces Greene's men had been defeated, but that fact apparently made little difference either in their plans or in their determination.

Beaten in one place, they quickly retreated to another and the Redcoats were compelled to follow. All the time Lord Cornwallis was being drawn farther and farther from Charleston, his base of supplies, and his difficulties steadily increased.

General Greene was assisted by the daring of the men under Sumter, Marion the Swamp Fox, and others. Night attacks, raids at unexpected places and times, kept Cornwallis in a continual state of perplexity. He did not know where next his enemies would appear, and when in swift pursuit he did his utmost to overtake and scatter or capture them. Even when apparently he had accomplished his purpose his crafty foes escaped. The very rivers across which the retreating Colonials fled rose within their banks and put an end to the chase for a time.

The patriotic farmers and their boys joined Marion or Sumter or others of the leaders, and, after serving in the army for a few weeks, returned to look after the work on their farms; in a brief time, this task accomplished, they once more relieved the men who meanwhile had taken their places in the ranks of the fighting patriots.

The Tories followed a similar plan; now assembling to help the regulars, now giving their places to others to go home to look after their families and crops. It was a time of civil war. The hand of brother was raised against brother and frequently father was fighting against son. Neighbors that had been friends for many years

were now bitter enemies, and no damage was too savage or brutal for them to inflict upon their foes.

Naturally the boys shared the feelings of their elders, and none was louder than they in their denunciation of the "hirelings" that were trying to deprive the people of the Carolinas, as well as of the other American colonies, of their rights.

Not long before the time when this story opens, Tim Bludworth, after many vain appeals to his father that he too might join Sumter, had been permitted to go with the colonel on one of his periodic services in the band. It is true his duties had chiefly consisted in collecting the few horses that as yet had not been taken, but even that minor task was better than being kept out of the partisan struggle altogether, and upon his return home Tim had many things to tell Jim Paget the bound boy [1] who worked for and lived in the family of the colonel. The few negroes on the small plantation also helped to provide an audience for Tim, and they not only listened attentively to their young master, but also were keenly aroused by the atrocities of the hated Tories.

Chief among these dusky admirers of the youthful Tim was 'Lijah, a coal black negro boy of the

[1] In the days of the Revolution and for several generations after the war was ended, it was a common custom in America to "bind out" orphan or homeless children. An agreement would be made by a certain party to provide a home, living, clothing, etc., for the orphan, in return for which the boy thus bound out gave his services until he became of age. These boys were known as "bound boys."

same age as the hero of the surprising adventures. "Lige," as he was commonly called, was a frequent companion of the colonel or of Tim and Jim Paget on their hunting and fishing expeditions, for Colonel Bludworth was as easy-going and good-natured in his dealings with his half dozen slaves as he was in his tasks on his plantation or in his relations with his son Tim his bound boy Jim Paget. Altogether life on Colonel Bludworth's place was not strenuous, at least not until the Redcoats or the Dutch butchers came and began to persecute the Tarheels for their perverse opposition to King George III.

Both Jim Paget and Tim Bludworth were aware of these conditions when they met in the woods late on that July day in 1781, directly after the former had disposed of his harmless enemy, the water snake that never again would sun itself in the hot and dusty road that led from Colonel Bludworth's plantation through the woods to the shore of the North Branch of the Cape Fear River.

"Y' ought toe see the snake I killed!" called Jim Paget excitedly, as he greeted his friend.

"What kind was it?" demanded Tim calmly.

"Water snake."

"Humph!" grunted Tim. "Nothin' t' kill one o' them. They won't bite, won't bite even a dead fish. They just swallow 'em whole."

"But this was a whopper!" protested Jim Paget. "He's more'n a six-footer an' his mouth

opened more'n six inches. He wanted t' fight——"

"Wonder he didn't swaller ye," broke in Tim scornfully.

"He was bigger'n th' one yo' all killed in the swamp over by Nigger Head Point."

"All right. I'll take yore word for it. I've got somethin' more important than dumbhead water snakes," declared Tim.

"What?" asked Jim Paget quickly. He was impressed now by the subdued excitement in Tim's manner which hitherto he had failed to recognize in his elation over the killing of the snake.

"I saw George Rippel and John Casler back here a spell."

"What about them? What were they doing?" demanded Jim Paget quickly. The mention of the names of the two most bitter Tories of the entire region was sufficient of itself instantly to arouse his interest.

"Just a settin' an' a talkin'."

"What about? Did yo' hear 'em? Did they see yo'? What were they a-sayin'?"

"I heard them all right. They didn't know I or anybody was nigh. When I see 'em a settin' thar on a log by the road I jest knew they wasn't thar for anything good, so I made up my mind I'd creep up an' find out what was goin' on. Now I'm glad I did."

"What did they say? Could yo' get nigh enough to hear what they was a-sayin'?"

"I sholy did," replied Tim slowly, as if the recollection of the conversation was still troubling him.

"What did they say?"

"Lots o' things."

"But what?" demanded Jim Paget, whose curiosity was now keenly aroused.

"They was a-talkin' about gettin' all th' Tories to meet at Wilmington."

"When?"

"Day after t'morrow."

"What for?"

"Seems that there's t' be a band o' Redcoats there."

"What for?"

"What for? Can't y' say anything but 'what for'? What are th' Redcoats for anyway? What for did Cornwallis bring 'em down yere from New York? It wasn't t' p'rade 'em, was it? You know 's well 's I do what they're in No'th Car'lina for. If yo' don't know, then I can't tell ye."

"Yes, yes, I know," said Jim hastily. "They'll be settin' fires an' chasin' folks out o' their homes, an' stealin' th' pigs an' chickens an' shootin'. That's a part o' what they'll be a-doin' an' right soon, too. But what are th' Tories doin'? What for be they joinin' 'em over at Wilmington?"

"I reckon y' might guess what they're plannin' toe do."

"They'll be helpin' th' Redcoats by tellin' 'em

who's got any money hid in their socks an' where they'll be mos' likely t' find good pickin's."

"That's what they will."

"Where they goin' t' meet?"

"Ain't goin' t' meet at all."

"I thought y' said they was t' meet at Wilmington. That's only about a dozen miles away."

"Correct, chile. Their plan is not t' meet anywhere but t' gather in th' town an' all get ready there for th' doin's th' traitors are plannin'."

"What d' yo' think they'll do?"

"It's as plain as th' nose on your face. Prob'ly th' Redcoats will split up into small parties an' th' Tories'll be their guides. They'll show 'em th' best an' shortest ways t' reach the places where th' Whigs live an' they won't have much more t' do. The reg'lers'll furnish th' rest. I'm tellin' yo', Jim Paget, there won't be a house left standin' in all o' these parts if we don't do somethin' t' stop 'em."

"What can we do? We're only a couple o' boys. Lige might help but he——"

"Never mind Lige, he doesn't count for much. We've got t' stir up the others."

"What others?"

"The men, o' course. We'll put straight home and tell pop about it, first o' all."

"What will he do?"

"Trust him! He'll know some way, an' if he doesn't he'll find one."

"I reckon he will. We'd better start. It'll be

sundown in an hour or two. I'd like t' have yo' take a look at that snake I killed though, before we start. He's only a little way from here an' I'll——"

"Never yo' mind that snake," interrupted Tim. "We've got more important matters than water snakes t' 'tend to now, even if they be four feet long."

"I tell yo' he was six foot if he was an inch!" spoke up Jim Paget quickly.

"Have it yore own way," laughed Tim. "I'm not disputin' yo'. Mebbe he did look like he was a six-footer. Yo' prob'ly was some excited when he was chasin' yo' through the brush."

"He didn't chase me an' he was six foot long," declared Jim Paget sharply.

"I'm not quarrelin'," said Tim dryly. "I'm just a-sayin' as how he prob'ly looked bigger'n a meetin'-house. Mebbe he was," he added consolingly. "All I know is that we don't want t' stop now toe examine any dead snakes. What we've got t' do is t' put it straight for home an' tell pop all about what I heard George Rippel an' John Casler a-talkin' about. That'll be about enough for me for a spell, I'm thinkin'. Come along."

Thus bidden, Jim Paget swung his fishing pole over his shoulder and, grasping his string of fish firmly in his hand, followed Tim as he swiftly led the way over the rough roadway. Within a few

minutes both boys were walking rapidly through the woods, eager to arrive at home and report the startling conversation Tim had overheard between the two most bitter Tories of the entire region.

CHAPTER II

AN INDIAN TARGET

WHEN the excited boys arrived home, for to Jim Paget Colonel Bludworth's house was the only home he had ever known, and he was treated by the easy-going colonel as if he were a member of his household, not merely as a boy "bound out," Tim was informed that his father was out in the "shop." This "shop" was a room in one of the barns on the place in which Colonel Bludworth kept most of his guns. A bench with a few simple tools provided most of the equipment. Upon the walls were a few tokens of the colonel's prowess in hunting, the one occupation which he loved above all others. A buck's head with spreading antlers, the skins of rattlesnakes and copperheads, a stuffed wild goose, a bearskin and fox's brush were other evidences of the man's tastes and skill.

The room, or shop, now as usually, was in disorder. Shavings littered the floor, tools had been left where last they had been used, only the gun rack was in order. The colonel's pride in his guns was so keen that whatever might be his defects in other lines, his guns were always cared for.

The two boys found Colonel Bludworth busy at his bench, and it was plain that he was just completing a new gun. He was giving the finishing touches to the weapon, the stock of which he had just fitted to the barrel.

"That's a thumpin' big gun y' got there," said Tim, as the boys entered the shop and with interest looked at the heavy weapon, now completed in the hands of the colonel.

"This is Old Bess," said the colonel, as he lifted the heavy gun to his shoulder and sighted it at a knothole in the side of the room.

"How far'll she carry?" asked Jim Paget.

" 'Bout four hundred yards."

Jim Paget whistled in amazement. Four hundred yards! The distance seemed incredible even for such a weapon as Old Bess was likely to be. "How big a bullet does she carry?" he inquired.

" 'Bout three ounces, mebbe four." Colonel Bludworth seldom made definite replies and " 'bout" was one of his favorite expressions. "I'll give yo' all a chance toe help me try her out pretty soon. I've set up a target out on the border o' the woods and we'll soon find out whether she can send a bullet as far in front o' her as she can kick behind her. Mebbe yo' boys won't care about testin' her out. She's liable toe kick yore shoulders right out o' joint." The colonel's little eyes twinkled as he spoke and the wrinkles in his round, fat face seemed to deepen.

The doughty colonel never gave one a military impression. He was short and fat and his eyes betrayed his somewhat lazy disposition. His boast was that he "never worried," that military men had to learn to be philosophers and take things as they come. "There's jest two sides toe this worryin'," the colonel was wont to declare. "Ain't no use worryin' 'bout th' things yo' cain't help an' if there's things threatenin' toe go wrong that yo' can help, then the thing toe do is toe quit worryin' an' set 'em toe rights."

The good-natured warrior was thoroughly consistent with his declaration, for he did not worry over the things that could not be helped, and as for the second division he had made, apparently it had not as yet come near him.

As a consequence, the forty years of the colonel's life had been tranquil for the most part. He loved his family, and his friends were fond of him. He did not have trouble with his darkies, for he was easily satisfied with what they did, and apparently was not dissatisfied with what they left undone. As has been said, his chief interest was in guns and hunting, although since the Tories had become so troublesome of late he had classed them with the prowling wolves and snakes, fit only to be exterminated. Indeed, it was even said by certain of the friends of the worthy man that he had taken to hunting Tories very much as he hunted foxes before the coming of Cornwallis into the "Tarheel" country.

"Yo' may need yore gun, pretty soon," suggested Tim.

"How's that?"

In response to his father's inquiry Tim described his adventures of the afternoon, and as he related the conversation he had overheard between John Casler and George Rippel the anger as well as the interest of his father was quickly aroused.

"Th' doggone traitors!" he muttered when at last all of Tim's story was told. "I've been a suspectin' that John Casler as bein' up toe some new devil's tricks. I wish I knew more 'bout jest what they're plannin' toe do. Yo' say it's day after t'morrow they're a-plannin' toe meet at Wilmington?"

"Yas, suh."

"Yo' didn't hear 'em say how many o' th' Redcoats was to be there?"

"Accordin' toe what John Casler said, there'll be a right smart lot."

"Yo' don't know 'bout how many?"

"No more'n that."

The colonel was silent a brief time and then said, "I've a notion toe try out a scheme I've been thinkin' 'bout. Th' doggone traitors!"

"What's the plan?"

"I'll send one o' yo' boys over toe John Casler's t'night."

"What for?"

"Toe take a word. We'll ask John toe come over here day after t'morrow."

"Will that be better'n havin' Lige go toe Wilmington?"

"Why should Lige go toe Wilmington?" asked Jim Paget quickly.

"He can go there without anybody suspectin' him," replied the colonel.

"We can do both," suggested Jim Paget. "Let Lige go toe John Casler's t'morrow an' if he hears or finds out anything of importance then I'll go toe Wilmington. Nobody'll suspect me of anything over there. Not even John Casler or George knows that we've heard anything 'bout what's goin' on at Wilmington."

"That's a good suggestion," agreed Colonel Bludworth heartily. "T'morrow right after sun-up we'll send Lige over toe John's an' if he has anythin' t' report we'll let yo' take the skiff or th' canoe an' try toe find out what's bein' done in Wilmington."

The plan having been accepted, the colonel continued, "Now I'll let yo' boys go with me toe give Old Bess a trial."

"Where?" asked Tim.

"Just yonder. I rigged up an old barn door out there by the woods an' I painted th' face of an Indian on it. That'll make a good target an' will give us a chance toe find out if yo' boys can stand up after the old gun has spoke her piece. Unless I'm very much mistaken she has more kick in her than th' hind leg o' a mule."

"We'll try her," said Tim eagerly. He shared

in his father's love of guns and hunting and was ready at any time to accept a challenge such as had been made by the colonel. "When do we start?" he added.

"Right now. It won't be sundown fo' a half hour yet and we'll have plenty o' time toe test her out. Mebbe I've jest got her fixed up in the nick o' time if these Tories an' Redcoats are plottin' toe do any damage 'round these parts. Come along, we'll soon find out."

The trio at once withdrew from the shop and, with the colonel leading the way and carrying Old Bess slung across his shoulder, they soon arrived at the place they were seeking. True to his word, the boys discovered the old barn door which Colonel Bludworth had set up near the border of the woods, and on it was the face of an Indian, painted a vivid red and clearly seen in the light.

"I'll take my turn first," said the colonel, "jest toe show yo' all how toe do it. Then I'll give each o' yo' a chance. Aim straight fo' th' nose. I painted that a bit redder'n th' rest o' the face on purpose toe give yo' a mighty good target. Now then," he added, as he raised the heavy gun to his shoulder, and after taking a quick aim pulled the trigger.

With a noise like the report of a cannon Old Bess responded. The boys were too much excited to notice that the colonel staggered after the discharge, and both ran swiftly to inspect the target.

A shout arose when they discovered the mark

of the bullet which had passed directly through the right eye of the painted face. "Pretty nigh a bull's-eye!" called Tim to his father, who had not left the spot where he had been standing when he fired. While the boys were absent he carefully swabbed the barrel and then with equal care reloaded.

"A good shot, pop!" declared Tim, as the boys came back. "The bullet went plumb through the right eye!"

"If it had been a Tory he'd have a headache or be seein' stars," joined in Jim Paget. " 'Twas a mighty good shot."

"Try yore luck now," suggested the colonel, holding forth the gun as he spoke.

Tim at once took the heavy weapon and stepped forward to display his skill as a marksman. Even to him the effort to bring the gun to his shoulder was a test of his strength, and the colonel laughed as he said, "I'm thinkin' that gun is goin' t' call fo' a full-grown man toe handle it. If it's too much of a load, don't try it."

"I'm all right," retorted Tim sharply, as he lifted the gun once more to his shoulder.

"Look out she doesn't kick yore head off," warned Jim Paget.

The youthful shooter disdained to reply to the suggestion and after a brief delay he pulled the trigger.

Again there was a loud report and Tim was nearly thrown to the ground in the "kick." A

loud laugh greeted his efforts, louder, however, from the colonel than from Jim Paget.

Doubtless the latter was not without certain serious thoughts concerning the results of his own coming test. However, he joined Tim as the latter, after handing Old Bess to his father, began once more to run toward the target.

"That was a great shot," said Jim Paget, as soon as they saw the mark of the bullet. "Yo' sure plugged his left eye! Right plumb through it! It's nigh a half inch nearer the nose than yore dad come."

Tim, elated by his success, was silent, though his face was glowing with pride. It was Jim Paget who laughed at the colonel when the boys rejoined him and said, "Yo' all want toe look out, Colonel, or th' chip'll be bigger'n th' old block before y' know it."

Colonel Bludworth, somewhat crestfallen because his very good shot had been excelled by his son's, laughed at the earnest face of the short, stocky Jim Paget, whose eyes at once had become serious again as he was aware that his turn to shoot had come.

"Here yo' go," said the Colonel good-naturedly, as he handed the gun, which he had reloaded while the boys were absent, to Jim Paget. "Good luck, t' yo'! Yo've got toe be some shot, young man, t' do better'n Tim an' me."

Jim Paget quietly took Old Bess and stepped forward. The gun was even heavier than he had

thought. He was compelled to exert all the strength he possessed when he lifted it. His arms were trembling while he was sighting it. He was aware of the interest of his companions and was determined to do his best. In spite of his efforts, however, the barrel of the gun was swaying slightly when at last he pulled the trigger and the terrific report followed. Jim Paget was thrown to the ground by the reaction, and for a moment it seemed to him that his right arm had been torn from his shoulder.

The laughing of his companions, however, restored a measure of his determination, and Tim called to him, "Want me toe get a basket, Jim Paget?"

"I don't want any basket."

"No, but maybe I ought toe get one and pick up th' pieces. Old Bess sure is a bad kicker."

Jim Paget ruefully rubbed his aching shoulder as he said, "I agree. Let's call it quits. I want toe find out before I go back jest how far I come from that grinnin' Indian's face."

"We'll know in a minute," said Tim, not altogether displeased over the mishap. "Yo' all don't need t' come. I'll take a squint at th' target an' report later."

"I'm comin' too," declared Jim Paget sturdily, as he painfully began to run toward the painted face. The gun had kicked and kicked hard, he ruefully assured himself. The muscles of his arm and shoulder were paining him severely. Another

time he would take more pains to see that the stock rested firmly against his shoulder.

"Here we are!" called Tim who was the first to arrive. "Yo' beat us both," he added after a hasty inspection. "Yo' smashed his mouth. Right straight in th' mouth! Honest, Jim Paget," he added, as he turned squarely upon the boy, "was that jest luck or did yo' go for t' do it, honest injun?"

As the youthful Jim Paget was known as one of the best of the younger shots in the region Tim's question was perhaps not unnatural.

"I reckon I jest happened toe make th' shot," said Jim Paget modestly.

"If pop should set Old Bess on th' Tories they wouldn't stand much chance, would they?" laughed Tim.

"Mebbe he'll have a chance t' try her. Three shots at two hundred yards an' all three comin' within two inches o' th' bull's-eye don't make Tories happy," said Jim Paget dryly.

"Who wants t' make 'em happy?" retorted Tim. "Yo' heard pop say they was all doggone traitors anyway, didn't yo'?"

"I heard him. Who's that yonder, comin' 'round th' corner o' th' shop?" Both boys stopped at the unexpected appearance of a newcomer and in the light which now had become somewhat dim they peered interestedly at the man who was approaching the colonel.

"It's John Casler!" declared Tim a moment

later in a low voice. "Of all men in th' world he's th' one I didn't think would be comin' here yet awhile. Come on," he added to his companion. "We want t' hear what he has toe say fo' himself."

CHAPTER III

A TORY VISITOR

COLONEL BLUDWORTH and the two boys waited in silence for their neighbor to approach. It is true John Casler's little home or "shack" was at least two miles away, but in the sparsely settled region he was looked upon as a neighbor. In the days before the great struggle had begun, John Casler had not only been neighborly but also friendly. On hunting trips Colonel Bludworth and he had gone for days together and in many ways they had shown and shared their common interest.

But John Casler had been for the King even before the "invaders" had entered North Carolina. His sentiments were freely expressed and led to many heated arguments between the two former friends, but since Cornwallis had brought his army the feeling had become intensely bitter. It was difficult now for Colonel Bludworth to have charity for his neighbor, and the result was that John Casler ceased coming to the colonel's place. When they chanced to meet in the road, a surly and decidedly formal greeting was all that masked their enmity. Even this formality recently had become shorter and tarter, while the expression on

the face of each man betrayed his bitter hatred of the other.

As John Casler drew nearer the place where the colonel and the two boys were waiting there was a brief time when all three suspected that he was about to pass without a word. The suspicion departed, however, when the visitor stopped and with an expression of gloating on his face said, "I reckon yore time is 'bout up."

"Which might mean what?" inquired the colonel with a prolonged drawl.

"It might mean a hundred things, but it shore does mean one."

"What might that be?"

"That the days o' the rebels is 'bout numbered."

The colonel smiled in his most tantalizing manner and was silent. Indeed there was an expression of contempt on his face as he looked calmly at his neighbor. John Casler, tall and rawboned, his long yellow whiskers stained with tobacco juice, his sandy hair also long and unkempt, his faded blue eyes and his general bearing of laziness and lack of ambition did not impress a beholder as one who possessed the marks of a dangerous enemy. There was, however, a dogged obstinacy in the man that was visible in the midst of the shiftiness and forlornness that seemed to enfold him as with a garment.

"Yas, suh," repeated John Casler, uneasy at the prolonged silence. "Yore days is done for an'

no mistake. I thought 'twould be only neighborly toe come over an' give yo' warnin'."

"Yo' always was a considerate cuss," drawled the colonel. "Yo' never had an eye out for yo'-self an' was always thinkin' what good yo' could do yore neighbors. Now spit it out, John Casler! Say what y' got t' say an' be done with it."

"That's all I got fo' t' say," retorted John Casler. There was, however, such an expression of malignity on his face that Jim Paget, listening intently and watchful of the man's every move, was reminded of the glitter he had seen in the eyes of the huge water snake he had killed that afternoon.

"No, it isn't," declared the colonel. "Y've got a heap mo' yo' want toe say. If y' want toe, y' might tell us what time yo're a goin' toe Wilmington an' what yo're goin' there for."

It was instantly plain that John Casler was startled by the abrupt words of the colonel. He stared blankly at the man for a brief time and then, after a moment of hesitation, said, "Yo' all think yo're right smart, don't ye?"

"Can't say as ever I had very many s'picions like that 'bout myself an' I shore never did have any 'bout my neighbors, leastwhile some o' 'em."

"Meanin' me?"

"Meanin' yo', that is, if yo' agree that the coat fits all right."

"It's too tight toe fit," broke in Tim, laughing loudly as he spoke.

"Keep yore words toe yoreself," said the colonel sharply to his son. "Y' mustn't interrupt yore elders. Children must be seen an' they must not be heard." In spite of the brusque words, however, it was manifest that the colonel was not unduly indignant over the interruption. Turning again to his visitor, he continued, "Now, John Casler, I want toe give yo' a bit o' advice. I don't charge anything fo' it, but it'll do yo' good if yo' all act on it."

"Keep yore advice till it's asked fo'," snapped John Casler.

"I can't. It's fo' the good o' yore soul. Hold on a bit," he added, as his visitor apparently disregarded the words of his neighbor, "I jest merely wanted toe remark that yore health'll be better if yo' keep away from the Tories an' th' traitors what are a plannin' toe gather at Wilmington right soon!"

"What do yo' know 'bout the Royalists meetin' at Wilmington?" asked John Casler, startled for a moment out of his self-control.

"Never yo' mind 'bout what I know nor yet 'bout how I found out. Is my advice good or bad?"

"Yo' all don't know anything 'bout what yo're talkin' 'bout."

"That's as maybe an' doesn't concern yo' nor me. Th' main thing is what I said. Is my advice good or bad?"

"Yo' may not be 's smart as yo' think y' be,"

retorted John Casler, recovering a measure of his confidence. "Th' fools ain't all Royalists. Most o' th' rebels belong there."

"Some folks don't know 'nough toe know what the' be."

"An' some can't find out. But yo' don't answer my question."

"I don't have t'."

"Course y' don't. Let me warn yo' though, John Casler, don't yo' all go near Wilmington fo' th' next three days."

"Why not?"

"I've told yo' somethin'll happen toe yo', somethin' neither yo' nor yore friends, that is, if yo' still have any friends, will ever be likely toe forget." The colonel was speaking quietly, but there was a fire in his eyes that plainly impressed his neighbor.

John Casler glanced uneasily about him before he said, "I don't believe y' know anything 'bout th' meeting at Wilmington."

"Yo' all tell George too what I'm tellin' yo'. It'll do him good too, for George ain't as big a fool as he looks to be. He jest gets into bad company sometimes an' he's likely to be made a fool of by them. Leastwhile, they'll try t' get him t' join 'em."

"Yo're much worried 'bout yore neighbors," sneered John Casler.

"I'm not th' one t' worry," retorted the colonel.

"Then what y' talkin' t' me this way for?"

"I'm not talkin'. I'm jest askin' yo' a straight question an' y' don't answer me."

"What's th' harm in goin' to Wilmington?" demanded John Casler.

"No harm if y' go at th' right time. That's th' whole jig."

"What'll happen if I do go?"

"Same's 'll happen toe all th' traitors an' Redcoats that are plannin' for a gatherin' there at th' time I'm warnin' yo' 'bout. Keep away, that's all I have t' say."

Colonel Bludworth spoke savagely and for a moment John Casler evidently was impressed. He said no more, however, and with a sneer on his face passed on, nor did he once glance behind him before he disappeared in the woods.

"They're shore plannin' toe meet at Wilmington," said the colonel, as he looked at the boys. He had been watching John Casler as long as the latter remained within sight.

"What are they meeting for?" asked Tim. "It can't be for anything good."

"Of course it isn't for anything good," snapped the colonel. "Nothin' good ever comes from the Tories an' when yo' get Tories and Redcoats together, then yo' all want t' look out."

"What'll they do?" inquired Tim.

"That's what we must find out."

"How'll we do it?"

"I'm thinkin' 'bout it right now an' I haven't got very far 'long in my plans. Th' first thing is

for Jim Paget here t' take th' canoe an' start for Wilmington."

"When?"

"Right now."

"Shall I go alone?" asked the bound boy.

"Yas, suh. Don't want anybody 'long with yo' when yo're on such a hunt as this."

"What shall I do when I get there?" asked Jim Paget, who had not yet recovered from the surprise the colonel's suggestion had aroused.

"Find out 'bout this plan."

"How shall I find out?"

"Use yore head. What's a head planted on the top o' yore carcass for except toe use?"

"But how shall I begin? Where shall I go? What shall I do first?"

"If yo' start now y' ought toe get there by ten o'clock. It's a long paddle but it won't kill yo'. Yo'd better go toe Sim Miller's first off. He'll probably put yo' up for the night an' then besides we can count on him for a good friend. Maybe some o' th' Tories don't know jest where Sim stands, but I do an' that's enough. He knows yo're all right an' yo' can tell him I sent yo' toe find out 'bout th' doin's being planned over there."

"I'll go," said Jim Paget simply. "When shall I start?"

"Right now. Tim an' I'll go down to help yo' off."

"I don't need any help."

"Then we'll save time an' not go with yo',"

said the colonel abruptly. There was such an abrupt and complete change in the colonel that both boys stared at him in surprise. His easy-going manner had disappeared and he was now alert and plainly aroused. "Yo' might wait toe get a bite toe eat before y' start," he suggested.

"Never mind that. I'll get along all right. Besides, if I'm hungry I'll get something toe eat at Sim Miller's." As he spoke Jim Paget turned away and started toward the place where their canoe was kept hidden on the bank of the North Branch.

"Don't yo' want a gun?" called Tim.

"No. No, he doesn't want any gun," said the colonel abruptly. "He'll be safer without one."

"I'm all right," responded Jim Paget. "I'll be back before long."

Colonel Bludworth and Tim remained where they were standing, watching Jim Paget until he was lost to sight in the woods.

"Come on, son," the colonel said, as he swung Old Bess across his shoulder and led the way back to the house.

"I don't see what yo' wanted toe send him toe Wilmington for?" suggested Tim thoughtfully, as he dropped behind his father. "Yo' know from John Casler's actions that there is t' be some doin's there. Isn't that enough?"

"Not when I can find out more. The more I know th' better I can plan toe block th' traitors. They're a bad lot."

"What are yo' goin' toe do?"

"I don't know but a part yet. I reckon I'll be better off when Jim Paget comes back."

"What y' thinkin' o' doin'?"

"Something t' keep th' doggone traitors from doin' what they're plannin' t' do."

"Yes, I understand that much. What's th' beginnin' o' th' plan?"

"Wait till Jim Paget comes back."

"Nobody knows when that'll be."

"He'll be home t'morrow."

"S'pose he doesn't come?"

"Then we'll have toe go ahead without him. He'll come, all right."

In spite of his impatience Tim was aware that it was useless to attempt to obtain further information from his father at the time. The dusk was deepening and night was at hand. In silence he followed the colonel back to the shop where Old Bess was carefully covered and then placed on the pegs in the wall that recently had been made for her. Neither spoke when the door was closed, and they started toward the house. Tim was surprised when his father, instead of entering by the front door, turned aside and, motioning for his son not to follow him, started toward the quarters of the slaves.

Puzzled by the action of his father, Tim stopped and watched him and saw him enter the little cabin in which Lige lived with his mother, Aunt Judy, who was the cook for the entire family.

What did the colonel's visit imply? His stopping at the cabins was an event so infrequent as to make his actions seem even more mysterious. What was he planning to do? His silence too was strange and Tim was positive that his father must be deeply aroused. Without question his behavior somehow was connected with the words of John Casler and the departure of Jim Paget, but just what the connection was Tim was unable to conjecture. It was *something,* however, that had to do with the colonel's plan.

Tim was about to enter the house but he stopped abruptly and, turning toward the woods, listened intently. A moment later the strange sound which had startled him was repeated. It was so faint, however, that he could not be positive that he really had heard it. To the startled boy a cry for help had been borne to him on the night air and the voice was that of Jim Paget.

Still he waited and listened. The call, if it was a call, was not heard again and Tim once more turned to the house.

"It couldn't be Jim Paget," he said to himself. "He's over by th' Branch long before this, and no voice could carry that far. I must have dreamed it. Maybe it was an owl."

Whatever the cry might have been—of bird or beast or a call for help from Jim Paget—Tim Bludworth was greatly disturbed when at last he resolutely lifted the latch and entered his father's house.

CHAPTER IV

THE SEARCH

WHEN Jim Paget left his friends and started toward the place where the canoe was kept he was still confused over the project which confronted him. It was not plain to the lad just what he was expected to do. Twelve miles, the distance to Wilmington, was a long way to paddle, but even after he should have arrived, what he was to do was by no means clear to him. He was to go to Sim Miller's and find out about the plans of the Tories. Suppose Sim Miller did not know?

Sim Miller was a cobbler who had done odd jobs for the family of Colonel Bludworth, and several times Jim Paget had been the errand boy. In good weather a sail to Wilmington in the little catboat was not undesirable, but to make the voyage at night and in a canoe was an entirely different matter.

Besides, Jim Paget had no great confidence in the knowledge Sim Miller might possess. The cobbler was a very talkative man, holding opinions on all subjects great or small, which he was more than willing to express to his listeners. Seated on his rude bench, he talked unceasingly while he

worked, dividing his attention between Lord North and King George III and the mistakes of Governor Tyrol in dealing with the sturdy people of North Carolina.

However, the problem of finding and obtaining information from Sim Miller was more remote than the one that immediately confronted him. Striving to banish from his mind thoughts of what he must do when once he arrived in Wilmington, Jim Paget resolutely continued on his way and soon arrived at the bank where his canoe was kept concealed in the brush that grew rank along the shore.

The light was sufficient to enable him to locate the canoe and drag it from its hiding place. He placed it in the water and, taking an additional paddle to be used in case of emergency, he kneeled and prepared to set forth on his voyage. As he lifted his paddle he was startled by a voice that apparently came from the midst of the near-by trees. "Jim Paget, is that you?"

The lad glanced anxiously all about him, but could not discover any one near.

"Jim Paget, what yo' doin' in that canoe? Where yo' all plannin' fo' toe go?" again called the unseen speaker from the shore.

Still the alarmed boy was not able to discern any one in the dim light among the trees.

"Where yo' startin' for?"

"Who's callin'?" inquired Jim Paget. His voice was trembling in spite of his efforts to con-

trol it. He was frightened too, but had not lost his self-control.

As if in answer to his question two men advanced from the darkness and approached the bank, for Jim Paget had not yet begun to paddle. One of the men strongly resembled John Casler, but of course it could not be the man, for only a little while before he had been talking to Colonel Bludworth and the two boys, when they had been firing at the improvised target which had been set up on the border of the woods. Thus Jim Paget resolutely strove to assure himself.

"We all know what yo' all is tryin'," declared one of the men, whom the lad was unable to identify.

"Then yo' know more'n I do."

"The colonel is a sendin' yo' toe Wilmington."

Jim Paget was startled but he did not respond to the suggestion. "What if he did, John Casler?" he asked after a brief silence. "That's no more'n yo' yo'self are doin'. I never heard it was any crime toe go there."

"Come ashore!" demanded John Casler sharply, for the speaker was the hated Tory.

For a moment Jim Paget was tempted to drive his paddle into the stream and attempt to escape across the river. The suggestion was quickly abandoned, however, when one of men on the shore stepped forward and before the boy could act, seized the bow of the canoe and overturned it, throwing him into the water.

Jim Paget floundered and his mouth and nose filled with water. After a brief struggle he regained his footing and hastily climbed up the bank. "What did yo' do that for?" he shouted in his anger.

Both men laughed at his plight, but it was plain that there was more than a rough joke in their thoughts.

"What did yo' all do that for?" repeated Jim Paget, his anger increasing as he spoke.

"Y'll find out right soon," said John Casler. "Yo' keep yore mouth shut tight and come along with us."

"I'm not comin' with yo'!" shouted Jim Paget.

"Yas, yo're comin' with us." As he spoke John Casler brutally struck the boy on the head.

Jim Paget, as soon as he recovered from the blow, instantly turned toward the woods and attempted to seek safety in flight. His efforts, however, were useless for his captors quickly overtook him. As they seized him Jim Paget shouted in his loudest tones, "Colonel! Colonel Bludworth! Come and help me! John Casler——"

The lad's voice was silenced as the two men threw him roughly to the ground and kicked him viciously.

"Now, d'yo' think yo' can keep yore mouth shut?" demanded John Casler, as once more he kicked the prostrate lad. "Speak up!" he added with a fresh and still more vicious kick. "It won't

do yo' any good toe call on th' colonel. He can't help yo', an' besides he'll have all he wants t' do lookin' after his own affairs. I'm thinkin' he's not likely t' have much toe look after right soon."

Both men laughed as John Casler spoke and then the second man, whom Jim Paget still failed to recognize, said, "Now, sonny, will yo' come 'long with us like a good little boy?"

Jim Paget was now fully aware that it was hopeless for him to escape by flight. The two men were stronger than he and both doubtless were armed. He must submit, at least for the time. In a low voice he asked, "Where do yo' want me toe go?"

"We don't 'want' yo' toe go anywhere. Yo're comin' right along with us. It'll be better for yo' if yo' come peacefully, but yo're comin' anyway."

As he spoke, John Casler seized Jim Paget by his collar and at once started swiftly along the bank, compelling his prisoner to accompany him. Nor was the young prisoner offering any resistance, though he was thinking of the means of a future possible escape. Chiefly he was wondering whither his captors were taking him and what his fate was to be. The entire adventure was unexpected and unaccountable.

The youthful prisoner was conducted to a small shanty about a quarter of a mile down the shore. Jim Paget often had seen the little building. Apparently it was deserted. The common report

concerning it was that years before it had been erected as a fish house, but it was thought to have been abandoned long ago and of late it had not attracted any attention, either from Jim Paget or Tim.

As soon as John Casler opened the door he pushed his prisoner before him; then closing the door, he himself entered. Jim Paget now was in total darkness. The mystery of the place and his uncertainty concerning his captor's plan increased his alarm. He remained silent, however, awaiting the next move of John Casler.

He did not have long to wait. "Hand over toe me that letter th' colonel give yo'," demanded John Casler.

"He didn't give me any letter," answered Jim Paget. "I haven't got any letter."

"Don't lie toe me!" said John Casler savagely. "Don't talk, just give me that paper!"

"I haven't any paper."

"Come on in," said John Casler to his companion, who for some reason had remained outside. "We've got t' search the young rebel."

"Give up th' letter and save yoreself all th' trouble," suggested the second man as he entered.

"I've told yo' the truth," declared Jim Paget. He was now thoroughly frightened. He was alone with the men and powerless in their hands.

"We know yo've got a letter an' we're goin' toe have it. We haven't any time toe waste here,

foolin' over yore tricks. Once more I ask yo' toe give up th' letter an' then we'll let yo' go," said John Casler.

"I haven't any letter. I told yo' that before. Yo' can kill me, but yo' can't find any letter because I haven't got any."

"Where did th' colonel tell y' toe go?" asked John Casler's companion.

"Toe Wilmington."

"What fo'?"

"Toe find out what the Tories was expectin' toe do there."

"How was yo' expectin' toe find out?"

"I don't know. Th' colonel told me toe use my head."

"Humph! Pile o' good that would do! How did he find out there was toe be a meetin' at Wilmington?"

"He didn't tell me."

"There isn't any use standin' here," suggested John Casler's companion, whose name Jim Paget had found to be Jed. At least John Casler had addressed him several times as "Jed."

"What shall we do?"

"Search him. Strip him an' leave him here fo' th' flies an' mosquitoes, that is, if he still says he won't give up his letter."

"I can't give up what I haven't got," said Jim Paget.

"Don't talk any mo' 'bout it. Open th' door an'

we'll have a look. He's got a letter somewhere on him an' we'll have a look at it. Don't yo' b'lieve a word he says," snarled John Casler.

His companion threw open the door and then both men turned upon the lad.

First they stripped him of his jacket and blouse and began to examine them. They turned the pockets inside out, neither of them speaking during the examination. Jim Paget stood silent, watching his captors and even offering to assist them in their search.

"Nothin' in here," growled John Casler, as he tossed the jacket into a corner. "Maybe we'll have better luck as we go on," he added, as he turned again to their prisoner.

Then the unexpected happened. Abruptly and without a word of warning Jim Paget leaped for the open doorway. His action was so sudden that neither of the men was prepared for it. One long leap carried Jim Paget to the entrance and another brought him outside. Then bowing his head as if he were carrying a heavy load, he began to run toward the near-by woods. He was aware of loud calls for him to stop, but disregarding them all he plunged forward. If only he could gain the shelter of the great trees his chances of escaping would be greatly improved. He was exerting all his strength as he ran, leaping across ditches formed by the rains. Behind him were his pursuers, doing their utmost to overtake him. Every moment Jim Paget expected to hear the

report of their guns but he was desperate now and determined to escape if his strength permitted.

"Stop there! Stop or we'll shoot!" shouted John Casler.

At that moment Jim Paget's foot was caught by an upturned root and he was thrown violently to the ground. At the same instant one of his pursuers fired, but the bullet passed harmlessly over the place where the lad was lying prostrate.

Without hesitating an instant Jim Paget leaped to his feet and resumed his wild flight.

The darkness prevented him from seeing the obstacles before him and several times he nearly fell again. Fear and determination, however, provided fresh motives and the desperate lad continued in his efforts to gain the interior of the woods. He was familiar with the region and was convinced that if he could only gain the place he was seeking he might be able to find some hiding place where he might evade the Tories.

Already he was looking about him, hoping to see some spot where he might conceal himself. A huge fallen log loomed before him. Instantly he recalled the spot. In the preceding autumn he and Tim had chased an opossum to this shelter. He now remembered that the huge log was hollow. Without hesitation he threw himself upon the ground and, desperate in his terror, clawed his way and crawled into the opening.

Fearful lest his feet might obtrude and betray

his presence, he did his utmost to dig in. His eyes were filled with decayed wood and dust penetrated his mouth and nostrils. An almost irresistible impulse to sneeze came upon him and he buried his face in his hand, doing his utmost to control it.

He soon heard the voices of his two pursuers. Apparently they had halted and were standing near his place of refuge. The log was cracked and Jim Paget could see the dim outlines of the branches above him. He was fearful the two men might see him, but it was impossible even to attempt to withdraw. His sole hope was in lying motionless and trusting the dim light to shield him.

"Beats all how th' little imp got away," growled John Casler. "If I could jest get my hands on him now he wouldn't ever get away again."

"He wouldn't need toe, he's done it already," said his companion. "D'yo' think he had a letter?"

"I dunno. I thought I'd find out. If he did have one we'd be in luck t' get it."

"I don't b'lieve the colonel would give him a letter. He'd know better."

"Whether he did or not the only thing left for us now is t' put straight for Wilmington. Th' sooner we're there, th' safer we'll be. Colonel Bludworth won't wait long after that boy gets

back with his story o' what happened to him."

"What'll th' colonel do?"

"I dunno. It'll be something quick. I know I don't want t' stay 'round in these parts. I wish I could have found his letter. Still I don't know as it matters so very much. Th' first house we'll set fire toe will be his. And it'll do me a world o' good toe see it go up in smoke," John Casler added angrily.

"What makes yo' so down on th' colonel?"

"He's always been down on me, that's the reason," replied John Casler savagely. "I'll get even with him if it takes all summer. I reckon he'll sing 'nother tune right soon. There isn't any use in our stayin' 'round here any longer. That bound boy has got away from us an' we might 's well start for Wilmington now 's any time."

"How far away is yore boat?"

" 'Bout half a mile."

"Yo' say she's all stocked up?"

"Yes, suh. She's fit. I've got a lot o' flints an' tinder stored aboard. I reckon it'll all be needed, too, if the plans go through 's they've been made. Come on. We'll start for my catboat an' get a good start on our trip toe Wilmington before th' colonel gets ready toe start after us."

His pursuers were about to abandon the chase? The thought was inspiring to Jim Paget. He decided he would remain in his hiding place until

the two men had had ample time to withdraw, before he attempted to crawl out from the hollow log.

A half dozen times within the next few minutes he decided that the time for him to leave had arrived, but each time he was fearful and still waited. He had no means for estimating the passing time. Perhaps he had not been there as long as he believed. An error now might be fatal.

At last, however, he concluded that he might make the attempt. Slowly and cautiously he pushed himself toward the opening by which he had entered. The work was difficult and frequently he stopped, almost convinced that John Casler had come back. When he was convinced that his alarm was baseless he renewed his efforts.

After the lapse of a time that seemed very long, although only a few minutes really had passed after he began his exit, he once more found himself in the open air. He stood erect and listened. The sound of a few gentle raindrops was all he heard. The silence was oppressive, almost terrifying. He cleared his eyes of the dust as best he was able and was about to start toward Colonel Bludworth's house when suddenly he halted. A new thought had come to him. With the departure of his two foes, why should he not return to the Branch and look for his lost canoe? If he could find it he might still be able to resume his attempt to go to Wilmington.

CHAPTER V

TWO CANOES

AROUSED by the thought of the possibility of yet accomplishing the task for which he had first started, Jim Paget, wet, bedraggled, with the decayed wood of the hollow log within which he had sought refuge still clinging to him, ran hastily toward the place where his canoe had been overturned. The little craft by this time might have drifted far from the shore. His recent captors might have taken it or by this time be searching for it. These thoughts and many other dire possibilities occurred to him, but he resolutely pushed forward, determined to learn the true conditions before he abandoned his attempt.

Moving cautiously and yet swiftly, Jim Paget at last arrived at the place he was seeking. Before he advanced into the exposed region he halted and peered intently before him. He was not able to discover a living object within sight. The rain was falling gently, but the darkness was not as dense as it had been when he was in the woods.

Advancing carefully, he soon was standing directly on the bank. He looked out over the river but the canoe was not to be seen. The current of

the stream was sluggish and he was confident the little craft could not have drifted far. Again and again he dropped upon the ground and looked out across the water but his efforts were vain. He had not seen the missing canoe.

At last he decided to move slightly farther down the bank. There was a bare possibility that the object of search had drifted ashore. The prospect was not promising, but he decided to test every possibility.

Glancing keenly before him to assure himself that his enemies were not watching for him, he walked slowly along the shore, frequently stopping to convince himself that his presence had not been discovered. If John Casler and his companion did what they had suggested in the conversation he had overheard, already they might have departed for Wilmington.

Encouraged by the thought, Jim Paget began to move more rapidly. His steps quickened when he thought he saw on the shore before him the canoe for which he had been searching. As he advanced he was convinced that his surmise was correct. The canoe had been drawn up on the bank, but his surprise was keen when he discovered another canoe alongside his own.

Instantly deciding that the second canoe belonged to John Casler, he was aware that its presence implied that the two men had not as yet departed. Startled by the suggestion, Jim Paget glanced hastily toward the woods and at that mo-

ment discovered the forms of two men emerging from the midst of the trees.

Had his presence been discovered? It was now impossible for the lad to flee without being seen, and if he should be seen the sight would instantly invite the men to shoot. If they did not, they would pursue him, and although Jim Paget was fleet of foot he was well aware that he would speedily be overtaken.

Quickly he threw himself upon the ground and began to crawl toward the water. Directly in front of him the bank was somewhat higher than elsewhere and the water had washed away quantities of the earth underneath, leaving a hollow place wherein he might hide.

Trembling in his excitement and fearing that he had been seen, the resolute boy rolled over the border and fell into the shallow water. Instantly he scrambled to the sheltered spot and then listened intently for the approach of his recent captors. He heard them distinctly, and it was evident that they were coming directly to the canoes, which were drawn up on the bank, only a few feet distant from the place where he had concealed himself.

It was becoming evident to Jim Paget that his enemies were not aware of his presence. If they had discovered him he was positive they would instantly have begun to run or their voices would have betrayed their feelings. They were conversing in ordinary tones and as yet he was not able

to distinguish their words. When they came to the bank, however, he plainly heard them.

"Got all yore ropes?" inquired John Casler.

"Yas, suh. Everything is all right and one trip more back to the cabin'll be all."

"I reckon yo' won't need me fo' that. I'll get everything here fixed up an' be ready when yo' come back. We'd better put all th' stuff in one canoe an' have only our guns an' paddles in th' other. How does that strike yo' all?"

"All right. We don't want toe lose any time. That boy may get th' colonel started up an' a passel o' th' rebels be down here before we all could get away. How d'ye s'pose th' little imp ever got away from us?"

"No knowin'. He's as slippery as an eel. Sometimes I'm minded he's a good bit smarter'n th' colonel's boy, Tim. He's just a bound boy, yo' know, but th' colonel acts 's if he was just as fond o' him as if he b'longed to his own family. Course he isn't, an' it doesn't pay t' give such trash too much rope. First thing yo' know they'll think the' own th' whole plantation. Yo' all run back toe th' cabin now an' get th' rest o' th' stuff. If there's more'n yo' can bring alone just whistle an' I'll come an' help."

John Casler's friend, whose name Jim Paget still did not know, at once started back toward the cabin, while John busied himself in arranging the various articles on board the canoe. It was evident to Jim Paget, who frequently thrust out his

head and watched the man at his task, that he had no suspicion that any one was near.

Abruptly a suggestion arose in the mind of Jim Paget. His excitement increased and he was watching now with an intensity that became stronger with every passing moment. He was listening for a whistle from John Casler's friend. With all his heart he hoped the man would discover that he could not alone bring all the remaining stuff from the cabin.

Meanwhile John Casler was working busily but without undue haste. Jim Paget's eagerness increased as he watched the man when he tied the two canoes in such a manner that one could be taken in tow. He carefully placed two rifles in the one in which the men were to paddle. When this task was completed John Casler arose and glanced impatiently toward the woods.

"Doggone it!" he muttered. "What's the matter with that man? He ought toe been here five minutes ago. I reckon I'd better go an' see what's wrong."

In his impatience John Casler started toward the woods. Jim Paget was trembling in his eagerness. He lifted his head higher above the bank and almost painfully watched him. The man was walking rapidly but to the watching boy his movements seemed unnaturally slow. Before he gained the woods Jim Paget arose and ran swiftly toward the two canoes.

In spite of his haste, Jim Paget did not forget

the need of caution. He hastily inspected the two canoes and their contents and then carefully took his position in the stern of the one he was to paddle. He was kneeling and holding the paddle ready for his first dip.

Before he struck the water he looked back at the place where last he had seen John Casler. Even in the dim light he was aware that the man had stopped and was looking behind him at the river.

Not a moment could be lost. Jim Paget, striving to act noiselessly, dipped his paddle and the canoes slowly moved forward. The laden canoe was not heavy and in a brief time the speed was increased.

Suddenly Jim Paget was aware of a commotion on the bank. It was plain that the departure of the canoes had been discovered. John Casler ran to the shore and as he stopped short on the bank, he shouted, "Hi there! Come back here! Come back!" When no attention was given to his frantic hail he called again, "Stop! Stop there or I'll shoot yo'! Bring back those canoes!"

The one great fear in the heart of Jim Paget was that his enemy might be able to carry out his threat to shoot. He was aware that two guns were lying on the bottom of the canoe he was paddling but he had no means of knowing whether or not the two Tories had other weapons.

His fear provided an additional incentive, and as he was by this time at least sixty feet from the

bank he had left, Jim Paget was aware that speed provided his best defense. If the Tories did shoot, then every additional yard he placed between them made the target more indistinct. If they did not have any guns, then he would be still safer as he fled farther away.

"Come back here! Bring back those canoes!" The calls and cries still followed him, but Jim Paget somehow was convinced now that he had nothing to fear from the firing of the men behind him. They would already have shot at him if it had been within their power to do so.

Relieved by the assurance, Jim Paget still knew that not as yet had he escaped all danger. There were bends in the stream and places where the banks were not far apart. There was a possibility that by running swiftly ahead his enemies might gain some place of advantage in advance and when he tried to pass they might leap into the stream and seize him. He clearly understood that it would be impossible for him to maintain the speed at which he was moving. Already he was breathing hard and his arms were beginning to feel the effect of the strain.

However, speed was essential to safety and the struggling boy did not relax his labors. Almost instinctively he guided his course nearer to the opposite shore. He was doing his utmost to avoid splashing in his paddling but in spite of his efforts an occasional break occurred.

Jim Paget had no means by which to estimate

the passing of the time. As he occasionally glanced at the shore it seemed to the desperate lad that now he was far below the place where he had seized the canoes. Actually not more than ten minutes had elapsed when at last Jim Paget was compelled to rest. His breathing was labored, streams of perspiration were running down his face and body, and the muscles of his back and arms were so stiff and sore that further effort was well-nigh impossible.

The lad ceased paddling and permitted the canoes to drift. He looked behind but not a living object was to be seen. The occasional heavy croak of a bullfrog was the only sound to break the tense stillness that rested over the water. At this point the stream was somewhat wider and even the shore from which he had come was dim and indistinct.

Jim Paget was intensely anxious. Now that he had decided to renew his attempt to go to Wilmington in spite of his first apparent defeat he was much more eager to succeed. When Colonel Bludworth had told him he was to start, his feeling had been more a reluctance to make the long trip on a warm summer night than a fear of anything that might threaten him on the way.

His visits in Wilmington had been frequent, though he had not often gone by canoe. The Branch did not provide an ideal sailing course. It had too many shoals and its channel was

crooked. In spite of those difficulties, however, both he and Tim had often sailed to the town for supplies and never before had they been in any worse peril than a drenching from a thunderstorm or a brief delay when they had run aground on some shifting sand bar.

The condition now was markedly different, as Jim Paget clearly understood. Men who were relentless were eager to take him. If again he should be in their power he well knew he would be dealt with without consideration. His life was in peril.

And yet Jim Paget somehow was elated. The excitement through which thus far he had successfully passed, the knowledge that the Tories really were expecting to assemble at Wilmington, the threat he had heard to burn Colonel Bludworth's house and possessions, all combined to increase the anger of the desperate boy. If it was possible to succeed in entering the town and in learning from Sim Miller what really was to be feared he was determined to do so.

A brief rest was all that Jim Paget permitted himself to take before he resumed his task. He was paddling now more leisurely, although he was no less desirous than before of making progress. Wilmington was still at least ten miles away.

Alternately resting and paddling, Jim Paget continued on his way. His sturdy body was bet-

ter able to endure the steady work than it had been in the desperate efforts he made when first he had seized the canoes.

However, he was not molested nor did he see any one until he came near to the place he was seeking. About half a mile from Wilmington he was hailed by a party in a rowboat with a demand for his destination. When Jim Paget explained that he was going to Wilmington he was roughly ordered to go back. The voice, the manner, even the uniform of the man, which Jim Paget saw in the dim light, combined to convince the lad that now the only thing to be done was to obey.

"What's goin' on in Wilmington?" Jim Paget inquired innocently.

"The Royalists are there and some regulars. No one is permitted to enter without special permission."

"That's too bad. I'll have toe go back home. How long'll it be before I can come toe town?"

"Not very long," replied the guard good-naturedly. Doubtless he had taken Jim Paget to be one of the country boys from the adjacent region and was sympathetic for the lad in his disappointment at not being permitted to enter town that night.

Jim Paget, however, was far from feeling downcast. He had already obtained the very information he had come to seek. "S'pose I come back in a couple o' days?" he inquired blandly.

"I don't know anything about that. Our men

will be here a spell, I think. Of course they won't stay in Wilmington all the while, but some of them'll be there all the time. No, sonny, I don't believe there'll be any use in coming back under a week."

Jim Paget slowly turned his canoes and in apparent disappointment started up the river. In his heart, however, there was great rejoicing. He had knowledge that confirmed the reports he already had made to Colonel Bludworth and he had escaped the danger of trying to enter Wilmington.

There still remained, however, the peril of encountering John Casler and his companion; Jim Paget, at the recollection, at once became thoughtful, and peered keenly across the water as he started on his return up the Cape Fear River.

CHAPTER VI

THE LANDING AT NEGRO HEAD POINT

IT was nearly five o'clock the following morning when at last Jim Paget returned to Colonel Bludworth's plantation. He was wet, bedraggled and so weary that every step, as he made his way through the woods, required a special effort.

The sight of the familiar buildings, however, provided a fresh incentive and the tired boy turned into the path that led past the shop to the house. His surprise was great when he discovered that some one was at work in the place. It certainly was not the custom of the colonel to rise at that unseemly hour, and yet as Jim Paget heard the voices of the men he was convinced that the colonel surely was there and so were Tim and Lige. They were talking as they worked and their tones were distinctly heard above the noise of the hammers.

"Where did yo' all come from?" demanded the colonel, as Jim Paget stepped through the open doorway. "When did yo' get back? Did yo' have any trouble gettin' into Wilmington? What was it that Sim Miller told yo'?"

"Give him a chance, pop," protested Tim with a laugh. "Can't yo' see he's 'bout beat out?"

"Yo' do look 's if yo' all had troubles o' yore own," acknowledged Colonel Bludworth, glancing sympathetically at Jim Paget. "Maybe yo'd better go into th' house first and get a wash. After Aunt Judy has given yo' a snatch o' ham an' co'n bread I reckon yo'll feel a bit more cheerful like."

"I'm all right," protested Jim Paget sturdily.

"Yo' don't look th' part then, that's all I can say," said the colonel. All three were eager to hear their friend's report, but his plight was so pitiful that not one had the heart to press him unduly.

"I got there," said Jim Paget simply.

"Did y' see Sim Miller?"

"No, suh."

"I told yo' to' see him p'tic'lar."

"I know it, but yo' all just wait a minute an' yo'll understand." With this brief introduction Jim Paget related the tale of his adventures up to the time of his return.

His hearers listened eagerly. An occasional interruption to express their disgust or anger when John Casler's treacherous deeds were mentioned, provided the only breaks until the lad ended his story.

"An yo' didn't meet a soul on yore way back?" inquired the colonel.

"Not one."

"An' yo' hid John Casler's canoe?"

"Yas, suh."

"S'pose yo' can find it again?"

"Yas, suh."

"An' all th' truck is still in it?"

"It was when I left it."

"Y' say there's a patrol right now all 'round Wilmington?"

"That's what they said."

"I wish yo' might have seen Sim Miller. Still I reckon even he couldn't 'a' told yo' much more'n yo' found out without him. It's all right, sonny. It'll sure clamp things down now."

"What do yo' mean?"

"Never mind now, yo' all just run 'long an' wash up an' let Aunt Judy get yo' some breakfast. Then after yo've had some sleep come out here an' we'll tell yo' all 'bout it."

Jim Paget looked about him in perplexity. The floor of the shop was nearly covered with baskets, rope, a block, mallets, jugs and many other utensils. What did it all mean? The lad was mystified, though he was positive that the colonel had a definite plan in mind and that somehow it was directly or indirectly connected with his own recent trip to Wilmington.

The expressions on the faces of Tim and Lige confirmed him in his opinion, but he was too weary even to remain for them to explain to him what it was clearly evident they were eager to relate.

"I'll see yo' all soon," said Jim Paget, as he turned and departed for the house.

In a brief time Aunt Judy had prepared breakfast for the tired and hungry boy. She expressed

herself vigorously concerning his appearance, and apparently was somewhat divided in her feelings between her sympathy with him and her disgust over his mud-bespattered face and clothing.

After Jim Paget had removed the traces of his recent experiences and was ready for the food which Lige's mother prepared for him he seated himself before the rude table in the kitchen and did ample justice to Aunt Judy's viands.

"Yo' all sho'ly was hungry, chile," said the kind-hearted colored woman, when at last Jim Paget arose. "Yo' insides must be made o' injy rubber."

"I reckon yo're correct, Aunt Judy," responded Jim Paget to whom the world appeared much less gloomy than it had a half-hour before. "I'm goin' toe my room now toe get a nap, an' when I wake up yo'll see me again. I shan't forget yo', Aunt Judy."

It was late in the day when Jim Paget arose from his bed. He was unaware that three times Tim had come to the room, each time hoping to find the lad awake. He would have aroused him had it not been for the kind-hearted colonel who had insisted upon permitting the weary lad to sleep. "He's done his part," declared the colonel, "an' I reckon we can go on with our plan just as well without him. He'll be all th' better when he does wake up. Let him sleep, lad, let him sleep."

True to his own suggestion, Colonel Bludworth,

together with Tim and Lige, was busy all day long. There were frequent and secret trips to the shore of the North Branch, where the catboat was kept and also to the place where the canoe was concealed. On these trips, planks, sacks of food consisting chiefly of corn bread, baked hams and pork, ropes, hammers, a rude block and tackle and various other implements were stored on board the catboat.

The little boat itself was drawn far up a little creek which emptied into the Branch and after the first trip to the boat had been accomplished, Tim, with a rifle in his hands, was left as a guard while the colonel and Lige continued making the trips between the shop and the shore, bringing their strange cargo for the little catboat. A casual observer would have conceded that the colonel was preparing for an expedition but one that was very unlike his ordinary hunting trips.

It was at the very time when Jim Paget awoke that Tim entered his room and said, "I didn't know but yo' was waitin' fo' Gabriel's trumpet toe summon yo'. D' yo' know how long yo' been asleep?"

"No. How long have I?"

"All day. 'Bout fo'teen hours I reckon."

"Why didn't yo' call me?"

"Pop said toe let yo' sleep."

"I reckon I slept all right."

"Yo' sho'ly did. We are 'bout ready toe start."

"Start? Where yo' all goin' ?"

"I don't exac'ly know, but pop says we must be on our way in 'bout an hour from now, so yo' better get movin'."

"But I don't see—" began Jim Paget.

"No more yo' don't an' not much more do I," interrupted Tim, laughing as he spoke. "Th' main thing is toe get started. Better let Aunt Judy fill yo' up an' then come out toe th' shop."

"I'll come now."

"No, yo' better do like I'm tellin' yo'. May be a long time befo' yo' all taste Aunt Judy's cookin' again."

"Are we goin' afoot or by boat?"

"By boat, I reckon."

"Then we must be headed fo' Wilmington," suggested Jim Paget positively.

"Pop hasn't told me. We'll find out 'bout all that later on. Better hurry up now and get ready. Everything else will come along afterwards. Yo' can trust pop every time an' all th' time, that is, if we don't stand in his way. An' even then I reckon we can give a guess 'bout what's likely toe happen," Tim added laughingly.

Thus bidden, Jim Paget hastened to the kitchen where in response to his appeals Aunt Judy speedily prepared food for him. A few minutes afterward Jim Paget arrived at the shop where it at once became manifest that the colonel was impatient to depart on the strange expedition, the suggestion of which had puzzled Jim Paget and con-

cerning which Tim had declared he possessed only slight information.

"Everything all right?" inquired the colonel, as soon as Jim Paget appeared. "If 'tis, we'll start. We want toe be ready toe go down th' Branch right after sunset."

The two white boys glanced at each other questioningly, but Tim merely smiled in response to the implied query of his friend. If he was aware of the details of his father's plan he did not explain.

Mystified by the activities and aware that an expedition of importance was being undertaken, Jim Paget shouldered the rifle which the colonel handed him and then at the word of the latter followed as he led the way over the well-trodden path to the Branch.

When they arrived, Colonel Bludworth summoned Lige, who had been sent in advance to prepare the canoe, and as soon as he had inspected its contents he turned to his young companions and said, "Now, Lige, I reckon it's nigh enough toe sunset fo' yo' an' Jim Paget toe fetch th' catboat over here. Watch out, both o' yo', an' don't let any doggone Tory suspect what yo're doin'. Better pole the catboat an' keep her close in shore. That'll be th' safest an' if yo' see John Casler or any o' his friends just whistle and Tim an' I'll know we're needed right where yo' all 'll be."

Still puzzled by the directions of the colonel, Jim

Paget departed with Lige and a few minutes afterward arrived at the place where the catboat was concealed by the rank bushes that were growing along the banks of the little creek on which the boat had been hidden. Jim Paget did not ask any questions, but he was quickly aware that the catboat was loaded with a strange cargo.

Lige was watching his companion and laughed as he said, " 'Pears like th' colonel is startin' fo' somewhar."

"It shore does. Yo' don't know where we're goin', do yo'?"

"Can't say as I does. Looks like we's a long way from thar, but I reckon we'll be on th' way right soon."

"Seems so," responded Jim Paget, as he seized one of the poles and with the aid of Lige began to push the laden craft down the inlet. A sharp outlook was maintained, but when they entered the larger stream no signs of the presence of their enemies had been discovered.

Convinced that thus far they had not been seen, the two boys, mindful of the colonel's directions, poled the catboat down the Branch, keeping close to shore and all the time watching for the Tories to appear. None had been seen when at last they arrived at the spot where Colonel Bludworth and Tim were waiting with the canoe for them to appear.

"See any Tories?" inquired the colonel, as Lige guided the catboat alongside.

"Not one," answered Jim Paget. "That doesn't mean, though, that no one saw us."

"We'll have toe risk that," said the colonel quickly. "It's dark enough now so't we can put out. We'll get on board an' set sail."

In the dim light of the summer evening the little catboat, with its excited passengers and strange cargo, started on its voyage down the North Branch for the Cape Fear River.

A constant watch was maintained, and as the wind was light and the little party was compelled to tack frequently their progress was correspondingly slow. In spite of the short distance, it was after ten o'clock when at last they were sailing down the Cape Fear River. Here, too, their progress was slow, for the wind had almost died away. Occasionally they resorted to their poles and twice they grounded. The movement of the catboat, however, was so slow that they did not have any difficulty and each time resumed their delayed voyage down the stream.

Midnight had come when at last Colonel Bludworth steered the catboat into a little cove. Under his direction the boys took in sail and made fast to a small cypress on the bank.

"Nigger Head Point," whispered Jim Paget to Tim. "Are we goin' toe stay here or is th' colonel thinkin' o' goin' on at sunup?"

"Yo' wait," was Tim's reply.

Convinced that waiting was the sole manner of learning the destination, as well as the purpose of

the expedition, Jim Paget said no more, as he at once busied himself according to the directions of the colonel. Apparently the leader was calm and not in the least aroused by any fear of attack by the hated Tories.

"Here, yo' boys, put this duffel aboard th' canoe," he ordered in a low voice, at the same time handing his young companions various articles that helped to make up the cargo of the catboat. Two rifles first of all were extended to them. "Put 'em in easy reach, one in the bow, an' one in th' stern. If yo' all capsize yo' won't have anything toe fight with, so I don't need toe warn yo' all toe be careful. Yo'll have a full boatload an' yo'll need toe be on th' watch all th' time."

When at last the canoe was laden as the colonel desired, he said, "Now on this first trip I want Jim Paget toe come with me. I'll show him where we're toe go, an' then on th' next trip he can go with Tim an' show him where toe land. Then Tim can go with Lige next time an' in that way we'll all have a hand in the business an' no one'll get so much of it that he won't be fit fo' what comes next. I just want toe tell yo', boys, that ev'rything depends on yo' all now. Come 'long, Jim Paget."

The colonel held the canoe with his hand, while Jim Paget, grasping a paddle, took his place in the bow of the treacherous little craft; then the colonel took a similar position in the stern. Tim pushed them out from the shore and the two occu-

pants, dipping their paddles in unison, moved steadily up the marshy, muddy stream near the outlet of which the catboat had landed.

Jim Paget was still puzzled. He had recognized their landing place as in a small bay into which a sluggish stream, the outlet of the adjacent swamp, emptied. The spot was not unfamiliar, for Negro Head Point abounded in foxes and occasionally he had gone there with the colonel to trap or hunt the animals. The present project, however, was still wrapped in mystery and Jim Paget was aware that it was useless to make inquiries of his companion.

Silently the colonel guided the canoe until twenty minutes had elapsed. He then steered the craft alongside a bank which appeared to be firm and strong. By his direction both stepped ashore and the contents of the canoe were soon landed.

"Now go back for another load," directed Colonel Bludworth when the task was completed. "Fetch Tim with yo' and then I'll send him back for Lige an' the rest o' th' duffel."

Jim Paget, without a word, took his place in the stern of the canoe and at once departed. When forty-five minutes had passed he and Tim were once more at the place where he had landed with the colonel. The second load was quickly placed on the bank and then Tim set forth to bring Lige and as much as possible of the remaining cargo.

"Couldn't bring the planks, pop," explained

Tim. "Had toe leave 'em an' a lot o' th' other stuff."

"I knew yo' couldn't bring all. I expected we'd have toe go back fo' a part. I 'ranged so 't some would be here and some on board th' catboat. Maybe we'll have toe take it all back befo' we're done but we've got enough fo' th' present an' we'll soon know 'bout th' rest. Fill up yore arms and follow me. I'll take Old Bess. She'd be a pretty heavy load fo' yo' all. Come along."

Thus speaking, the colonel led the way over the firmer ground with which he appeared to be thoroughly familiar. The boys followed in single file, each bearing his burden. No one spoke. The mosquitoes were about them in clouds. Occasionally one of the boys stepping into a soft spot was nearly thrown to the ground. A low warning from the leader greeted such mishaps but no halt was called.

Steadily the little force advanced until Jim Paget was almost ready to quit. His load was heavy, the muscles in his back were aching and every step now required a special effort.

At last, when it seemed to the troubled boy that he could not continue, the colonel abruptly stopped and said, "Drop yore bundles a spell. I'll make shore this is th' place I'm lookin' fo'."

Gladly the three boys cast their loads upon the ground, but not even the relief thus afforded prevented them from following the colonel's actions

with keen interest. He first looked all about him as if to assure himself that their recent approach had not been discovered. Apparently satisfied, he then peered long and steadily in one direction. Naturally the three boys all looked in that direction also but the only distinctive object they saw was a giant cypress about a hundred feet distant which lifted its huge trunk high above all the near-by trees.

There was, however, nothing in the tree to indicate that it possessed any special interest, and the boys then turned to follow the next movements of the colonel. He now was examining the ground around him. For a moment Jim Paget looked anxiously at him, for his actions were so strange that they implied that the man had lost his head. He was turning swiftly, occasionally moving forward, muttering to himself as if he were keenly disappointed.

He stopped abruptly and his feeling of deep relief was manifest in the tones of his voice as he said, "There it is. I didn't reckon I had lost my bearin's altogether. Now we're all right an' can go right ahead."

CHAPTER VII

THE HOLLOW CYPRESS

IN the early light of the morning all three boys saw a hole, at least four feet in diameter, in the ground before them. Apparently it had been made originally by the upturning of the roots of a great cypress in a storm. A mass of decaying, tangled roots stood like a barrier behind it, the wall presenting an appearance almost as if it had been made by the hands of many men.

"What is it?" inquired Tim, who was aroused as much by the manifest interest of his father as he was by the sight of the hole that had been left by the tangled mass. Both Jim Paget and Lige were kneeling on the ground, peering into the dark, open space.

"I'll tell yo' all 'bout it, boys," began the colonel. "I was out here one day last fall fox-huntin'. I took after the fox an' th' dogs went wild when they drove him to this cover. At first they didn't seem much toe like th' idea of followin' him into that hole, but I drove 'em on. Pretty soon I heard a faint yelpin' that I couldn't just locate. None o' th' dogs had come back so I was certain they must be under th' ground somewhere. I followed th' sound an' it led me straight

towards that big cypress over yonder. When I come closer I could hear th' dogs makin' a great fuss. An' th' sound 'peared toe come right from th' inside o' that cypress tree."

The boys were listening intently and Jim Paget was the most excited of all. Already he had suspected what the plan of the colonel was to be. He looked at the huge tree and then toward Market Wharf in Wilmington. The dock was not more than four hundred yards distant and it might be possible for the little party to be seen by men who came down to the river. The excited boy, however, was silent, waiting for Colonel Bludworth to continue his story.

"I made up my mind that th' old tree was hollow," resumed the colonel, "but I didn't know how far up it went. Finally I whistled fo' th' dogs, but I didn't want toe give up. The next day I came down here again an' brought Mose with me." Moses, or "Mose," as he was commonly known, was a young negro about twenty years of age who had been born on the colonel's plantation and was one of his most trusty slaves. "When I showed Mose that hole," explained the colonel, pointing to the excavation made by the torn roots, "he declared he was goin' in toe find out where it led an' what about it."

"Did he find that it led straight toe th' old cypress?" asked Tim.

"Straight as a ramrod," replied Colonel Bludworth. "He crawled in an' went plum' through

toe th' old tree. But that wasn't all he found," he added quietly.

"What else did he find?" demanded Tim.

"He found that th' hole led into a sort o' covered ditch like, an' th' base o' th' tree was th' end o' it. He went all the way through an' when he got inside th' tree he looked up an' saw it was hollow fo' at least fifty feet from the ground."

"It's a wonder it hasn't blown over in one o' th' winter storms," suggested Jim Paget.

"It's strong," said the colonel. "It'll stand a lot o' wind. Mose said it was hollow fo' at least fifty feet up as I was tellin' yo' all, but it might be hollow even farther up than that. Still I reckon fifty feet will do all right for what we're after."

"What yo' plannin' toe do?" inquired Tim, who now was as highly excited as Jim Paget.

"First thing, I'm goin' toe place Jim Paget out on th' point as a lookout. We're mighty close toe Wilmington an' we don't want John Casler or any o' th' other doggone Tories a spyin' on us. Now yo' better start right in," the colonel added, "just as soon as I have told yo' a little more 'bout what we're a goin' toe do. I've brought along some stuff we can drag through the tunnel an' when we get it once inside th' old cypress, we'll haul it up an' build a platform fifty feet or more right up there, inside o' th' tree. We'll haul everything up, for I've brought along a block and tackle as yo' may have noticed."

"How yo' goin' to rig it up, pop?" inquired Tim.

"First off we'll go in an' see if we can climb up. If we can, we'll put two or three timbers in there an' rig up our block an' tackle. We'll have toe cut two or three portholes both for light an' as places where we can let Old Bess sing her song toe th' Tories. I've heard since Jim Paget went toe Wilmington that th' Tories an' that doggone John Casler are plannin' toe get some help from th' reg'lers an' use th' old town as a sort o' base o' supplies an' a meetin' place. An' then they're goin' toe start right in toe settle scores with some o' th' patriots o' th' region."

"How did yo' find out?" asked Jim Paget.

"Never mind how I found out. It's enough fo' yo' all that I know what I'm talkin' 'bout. My place is toe be one o' th' first that's toe receive a visit from the rascals."

"Yas, suh, that's just what John Casler said toe me!" exclaimed Jim Paget. "I thought he was mostly talkin' an' there wasn't much more toe it. I didn't believe he'd dare try it."

"He wouldn't if he was alone," said the colonel. "He's a cur dog, a yellow cur, an' hasn't th' fight o' a ground hog if he's th' only one toe do th' fightin'. But yo' get a *pack* o' curs, they're just like wolves, they'll fight then. So John Casler will fight if there's toe be good backin', an' I reckon he'd like toe begin with me."

" 'Twould be more like him toe begin by settin' our place on fire," declared Tim angrily.

"So 'twould," agreed his father, "an' that's one reason why I'm here on Nigger Head Point this mornin'. I'm goin' toe git th' start on him. Now run along, Jim Paget," he added, turning to the bound boy as he spoke, "an' take yore place in that cypress yonder. I reckon yo' won't have toe stay there long. Just as soon as we get a floorin' fixed an' cut a few portholes we can do our own watchin' from th' inside o' th' big tree. But, sonny, yo' must keep a sharp lookout. If we should get shot before we get started, th' fat would all be in th' fire. Yo' an' I would lose our home, toe say nothin' o' some o' th' widow women an' orphans 'long the Cape Fear. Now get toe it, boys. We must rig up th' place in a hurry."

The loquacious and easy-going man suddenly appeared to be transformed. After Jim Paget started for the place where he was to be the watch he glanced behind and saw the colonel crawling into the entrance of the tunnel, dragging a heavy load behind him. Hammers, nails, ropes, saws, the block and tackle were to be taken first and every one of the trio was laden to the limit of his strength when at last they disappeared from sight.

Jim Paget hastened to the place assigned him and climbed high into a tall cypress. As soon as he was settled in his position he looked across

the river to Wilmington. He was unable to discover any signs of unusual activity. No one was loitering on Market Wharf, which fact of itself was unusual. Whenever he had gone in summer days to Wilmington he had landed at Market Wharf and usually there was an assemblage of loiterers there, white and black. To-day, however, not a man was in sight.

There were unusual sounds, however, that came across the water. Jim Paget was positive that he heard an occasional shrill note of a fife and the rolling of drums also was heard. Plainly, events of a stirring nature were occurring in Wilmington, even if Market Wharf apparently was deserted.

Jim Paget turned to look at the great hollow cypress where his friends were busy. No one was within sight there, but the excited lad was readily able to picture to himself the activities within the tree. Colonel Bludworth was making a fortress of the giant which towered high above all the trees and bushes of the Point.

He believed that he understood the reason why the colonel had worked so long on Old Bess. The colonel's unusual labors now were easily explained. The portholes that were to be cut were for the big gun.

Jim Paget glanced keenly up and down the shore and then again at Wilmington across the river. If Old Bess should speak, would the smoke following the discharge reveal the hiding place? He was somewhat uneasy over the possibility but

his interest in his immediate task was too keen to permit him to borrow trouble. His part now was to protect the hidden workers from their enemies.

Meanwhile the little party with Colonel Bludworth was working strenuously on their fortress in the big cypress. Each made his way without difficulty through the long, narrow tunnel and all discovered when they gained the great hollow base of the high tree that there was not sufficient light to enable them to accomplish their task. High above them appeared an occasional flash of light that made its way into the dark interior through a crack in the outer rim.

To Tim the sight was not inspiring because the distance seemed to be too great to be covered. Was their effort doomed to failure? How were they ever to climb to the heights above them? Then, too, there was the possibility that other occupants already might have discovered the place of refuge. Tim recalled the story of his father about the fox which had found a shelter in the hollow tree and also for a moment he had a vision of the huge snake that Jim Paget had killed a few days before when he first had learned of the dastardly plans of John Casler and his fellow plotters. Tim shuddered and for a moment he fancied he felt one of the slimy creatures crawling over his feet.

His attention, however, was speedily drawn to the words of his father and for the moment other thoughts were banished.

"I brought along a bow an' arrow," explained the colonel, "an' I've got a tallow dip here too. In just a minute I'll have a light." He drew a tallow candle from his pocket and, using his flint and tinder, speedily had the candle burning.

The light was flickering and feeble, but it was sufficient to enable all three to see about them, as well as above them. The ground beneath their feet was soft and yielding, consisting chiefly of the decayed wood that had fallen from the interior of the tree. The great circular walls appeared to be smooth, and, far above them, near the spot where the sunlight was seen, was what almost appeared to be a beam or rafter that extended across the open space.

"That's a strange thing," explained the colonel. "I've had that rafter up yonder tested an' its strong enough toe hold a man's weight."

"When did yo' try it out?" asked Tim in a low voice.

"Not long ago. I reckoned we might want a hidin' place some day if th' doggone Tories drove us out o' our homes, so I tested it out. Now watch me," he added.

Selecting an arrow to which a long cord was attached, he directed Tim to fasten the cord to a strong rope. When this had been done the colonel carefully drew back the bowstring and let fly the arrow.

True to its course the arrow shot up until it crossed the beam and then fell on the opposite

side, almost at the feet of the watching boys. Both seized the string attached to the arrow and began to pull. In a brief time the rope was drawn over the beam and the boys, after testing it, declared it was strong enough to bear the weight of any load they desired to hoist.

"First thing is fo' one o' us toe get up there. Here, Lige," the colonel added quickly, "yo're th' lightest. We'll fix this rope under yore arms an' give yo' a lift."

"Yo' mean I is toe go up yonder?" asked Lige. The light was not sufficient to enable Tim or his father to see that Lige was terrified. The height was appalling and no one knew what uncanny creatures might be waiting for him in the darkness above.

"Co'se yo're toe go!" said Colonel Bludworth sharply. "Yo're th' lightest, as I told yo'. All yo' all will have toe do is toe sit astride that beam an' when Tim an' I haul up a plank yo' just swing it 'round into place. Th' planks are a bit long, I made 'em so on purpose. Swing 'em up above an' arrange 'em so they'll have a rest on th' beam. That'll help toe keep 'em in place and hold 'em up. Th' floorin' naturally will be slantin' a good bit, but that won't do any harm. All we need is a platform big enough fo' all fo' o' us toe stand on an' have a bit o' room left toe store our stuff. Up yo' go now, Lige, an' as soon as yo're set give us th' word. Tim an' I'll haul up th' planks. When we've got six up there, then I'll come up next an'

we'll begin work. We mustn't make any more noise 'n we can help. I don't believe any o' the doggone Tories'll suspicion us, but it's well toe be on th' safe side."

The rope was carefully adjusted to Lige's body, the colonel drawing it carefully under the lad's arms. Twice by his direction Tim was lifted a yard or more and then dropped to the ground.

"It stands th' testin' all right," declared the colonel. "Yo're as safe as y' would be in yo're own bed, Lige. Take this mallet an' be sure toe hang on when yo' climb onto yore perch. Here yo' go."

At once Colonel Bludworth and his boy began to pull, and Lige speedily disappeared from sight in the upper darkness.

"He's as good a climber 's a monkey," said the colonel in a low voice to his son, when after they had hoisted the colored boy, they heard his signal that he was safe and on the beam. A few moments afterward the rope was lowered and they fastened one of the planks to it and together began to hoist it.

The air was close, almost stifling, and soon both the colonel and Tim were dripping with perspiration. The need of haste, however, was urgent and they did not rest from their labors until eight wide planks had been hauled to the waiting Lige.

"Now I'm goin' up," declared the colonel, when this part of their task was completed.

"D' ye think I'm strong 'nough toe pull yo'?"

inquired Tim dubiously. "I should hate toe drop yo'."

"An' I'd hate toe have yo'," said the colonel dryly. "I'm not goin' toe chance it. Course I know yo're 's strong as a young bull," he explained consolingly, "but I wouldn't trust Samson an' Gomorrah toe haul me up into that darkness. No, suh, I'm goin' up, but I'm goin' in my own way."

"Who was Gomorrah?" asked Tim, who was aware of his father's lack of knowledge of certain well-known men and places.

"Ask yore Grandmarm," retorted Colonel Bludworth. "I'm makin' this rope fast, d'yo' see? Now watch it an' hold tight an' see me go up—up."

True to his word, the colonel made fast the rope to a strong root and then, slipping a cord, to which he had attached a saw, over his shoulder, he braced his feet against the walls of the tree, grasped the rope tightly and began his ascent by holding his feet against the trunk and pulling himself by the cable as he climbed out of sight.

Tim, alarmed for the safety of his father, remained staring into the blackness above him, and a feeling of great relief swept over him when he heard him call, "I'm up here all right, lad. Now cast off yore cable an' send up Old Bess first trip."

The great rifle was sent aloft and then as soon as it had been received, Tim was busy in hoisting

the remainder of the cargo that had been brought in the catboat. Ammunition, several additional guns, a spyglass and last of all two baskets of provisions were speedily drawn to the place above.

"Now put out yore candle an' fix th' rope 'round yore body under yore arms," called the colonel. "Don't be afraid, we'll look out fo' yo'."

Whatever fear Tim experienced, he made no protest against his father's words. Speedily he adjusted the rope as his father had directed and in a brief time he was rising slowly and steadily toward the place where the colonel and Lige were awaiting his coming. At last he was on the improvised platform, and in the light which was much clearer than in the base of the tree he looked about him with keen curiosity.

The planks, most of which were slightly longer than the diameter of the hollow tree, had been laid in such a manner that they were uneven, one end being higher than the other. The colonel already had driven great spikes, some through the ends of the planks making them fast to the tree, and others into the trunk in such a manner that they were left protruding, thereby preventing any tipping. All rested upon the beam that extended entirely across the hollow. This beam Tim afterward found was simply a mass of the solid tree which for some unknown reason had not decayed as had most of the interior.

Satisfied that the flooring, which now covered two thirds of the space, was firm, the colonel said,

"Th' next thing toe fix is these portholes. We'll need three at least an' maybe more, but three'll be enough fo' a starter."

Taking the saw, the colonel at once began the task. First he cut a square about a foot and a half through the outside of the trunk. This was difficult work and when the first hole had been made he was quite willing to relinquish his task to his companions. The porthole was as high as his shoulder from the flooring and it was consequently still more difficult for the two boys to work rapidly.

The task at last was completed and the boys peered eagerly at the outside world. One hole was directly facing Wilmington, one opened toward the river at their left, while the third enabled them to look down upon the woods and swamp through which they had come. The little catboat and the canoe had been securely hidden. When the boys looked at the place they recognized the spot, but as neither was able to see the boat or the canoe they hastily concluded that they would be hidden also from other eyes, a conclusion which their later experiences did not entirely justify.

"We're all snug, now," said the colonel glibly. " 'Tisn't noontime yet, but th' next thing fo' us toe do I reckon is toe find out what is in those three baskets. Aunt Judy fixed 'em up, so I reckon they're all right."

"What about Jim Paget?" inquired Tim, who had been looking out of the porthole at the cypress

in which his friend had taken his place as guard.

"That's right. I'd almost forgotten th' lad. I reckon yo'd better whistle fo' him, but one o' yo'll have toe go down th' cable an' crawl out toe th' end o' th' tunnel toe meet him. He'd never find his way if yo' didn't."

"I'll go," suggested Lige quickly.

"No, let me go," said Tim hurriedly. "Jim has slid down his tree an' is comin' like a streak. Somebody must be after him or he must 'a' seen somethin' toe make him leg it like that. I'll go down toe meet him an' find out what's wrong. Here take hold o' the tackle an' let me down," he added hastily.

CHAPTER VIII

THE VOICE OF OLD BESS

THE rope was hastily adjusted beneath Tim's shoulders and he was lowered to the base of the great tree. The dimness of the light at first prevented him from seeing the exit, but in a brief time he discovered the opening and hastily crawled into the tunnel.

When last he had seen Jim Paget the lad was running swiftly, and, doubtless, Tim thought, by this time he must have arrived at the entrance to the tunnel. He was confident, however, that Jim Paget would be delayed somewhat as he probably would have to search for the hole. The thought caused Tim to increase his efforts and he worked his way rapidly through the underground passage.

When he emerged from beneath the ground he saw Jim Paget standing directly before him.

Startled by the unexpected appearance of his friend, he exclaimed, "Where did yo' come from, Tim?"

"Up in th' tree," replied Tim. "What's wrong? What yo' all runnin' fo'?"

"I don't just know."

"Don't know?"

"Yas, suh, that's just it. Where's yore father?"

"Up in th' tree. We've built a platform up there, an' we're just waitin'——"

"Inside o' th' tree?" interrupted Jim Paget.

"Yas, suh, inside o' th' tree. The old cypress is hollow fo' more'n fifty feet from th' ground an' we've got a place all rigged up there. We've cut some holes——"

"What fo'?"

"Toe give us some light an' toe make openin's fo' Old Bess."

"I see. I see," said Jim Paget quickly. "Can we all get up there all right?"

"Course we can. How did yo' s'pose I got down here?"

"I don't know. I hadn't thought much 'bout it. If we can get up there then we ought toe do it right smart. Go ahead, I'll follow yo'. I'll tell yo' all 'bout it just 's soon as I can get where th' colonel is. Don't wait here any longer."

Eager as Tim was to hear what Jim Paget had to tell of the cause of his sudden and swift return from his post, he made no protest and at once crawled into the tunnel. Jim Paget followed immediately and in a brief time both boys were standing within the base of the huge cypress.

A signal from Tim to his father was instantly answered, the rope was let down and the noose was dangling directly in front of the boys.

"Here, Jim Paget," said Tim hastily, "yo' slip

this noose under yore shoulders an' they'll have yo' up before yo' fairly know yo've started. Let me help yo','' he added, as he speedily adjusted the rope. ''Now when yo' get up there don't forget toe tell 'em I'm a-waitin' here.''

Jim Paget did not respond because at that moment in response to Tim's signal there was a strong pull on the rope and he was lifted bodily into the air. The ascent was successfully made and the rope then was let down for Tim, who quickly was drawn aloft and rejoined his companions.

As he stepped upon the rude platform he saw that his father already was eagerly talking to Jim Paget.

''Yas, suh,'' the latter was saying, ''there's a heap o' men gatherin' there on Market Wharf.''

''How many?'' inquired Colonel Bludworth.

''I can't just say, but there's twenty-five on hand already, or there was when I last saw 'em.''

''Could yo' make out what they was a-doin'?''

''No, suh. They seemed toe be gettin' ready toe start fo' somewhere.''

''Prob'ly toe set our place afire,'' suggested Tim sharply.

''I reckon yo're correct, son,'' said the colonel grimly; ''that's 'bout th' biggest thing in John Casler's plan. We'll take a look at 'em an' see what we can see,'' he added, as he reached for his spyglass and advanced to the porthole through which he adjusted the glass.

The remaining members of the little party were all silent as they excitedly watched the colonel and waited for his report. The report, however, much to the impatience of the boys, was not made promptly. Colonel Bludworth continued to peer through the glass, and it became evident that he was either greatly perplexed or deeply interested in what he saw.

At last, however, he turned quietly to Tim and said, "Take th' spyglass and see what yo' all can see."

Tim eagerly took the glass and stepped forward to the porthole. It was soon evident that he, too, was deeply interested in the sight on Market Wharf. Not once did he speak or look away until at last he turned and handed the glass to Jim Paget. "Try yore eye on it," he said quickly.

Thus bidden, Jim Paget looked long and earnestly at the distant wharf before he in turn handed the glass to Lige.

When every one had peered at the assembly the colonel in a low voice said, "What do yo' all make of it?"

"There's a crowd there," answered Tim, "an' they're all busy 'bout something, though I can't tell what it is."

"What did yo' make o' it, Jim Paget?" asked the colonel.

"It 'pears toe me they're gettin' ready toe start."

"Where do yo' think they're a-goin'?"

"Can't tell that. I counted four boats."

"One o' th' boats is John Casler's," spoke up Lige.

"It shore is," said the colonel. "Now th' point is if th' doggone traitors are startin' out in four boats an' one o' th' boats is John Casler's, where are they a-startin' fo' an' what be they a plannin' toe do?"

"That's all plain," said Tim quickly.

"What's all plain?"

"Why, they aren't startin' out toe go fishin'. They are goin' toe *do* something."

"What?"

"Just what they met in Wilmington toe do. John Casler told yo' what that was."

"Yo' think they're headin' fo' my place?"

"Yes, an' maybe fo' some other places, too."

"Yo' agree toe that?" inquired Colonel Bludworth, turning to Jim Paget as he spoke.

"I sho'ly do."

"An' do yo', Lige?"

"Yas, suh. Yas, suh, I agrees with 'em," responded the black boy.

"Then I reckon yo' all must be correct," said the colonel. "Now, th' point of th' whole thing is what can we do toe stop 'em?"

"There's only one thing toe do," declared Tim.

"What's that?"

"Let Old Bess tell 'em toe clear out an' go home."

"Do y' think they'll do what she tells 'em toe do?"

"Try her."

"That's a good suggestion," said the colonel, who already had taken the big gun in his hands. "I'll let her give 'em some good advice," he added, as he looked carefully at the priming. "I'm wonderin' if she can be heard that far," he suggested, as he thrust the barrel of the rifle through the porthole.

All three boys were now greatly excited. The light was sufficient to enable them to see every movement of the colonel. It seemed to Jim Paget, who was trembling in his excitement, as if Colonel Bludworth never would pull the trigger. He was waiting for the report, which doubtless would be terrific within the hollow tree.

"Both yo' boys beat me firin' at the Indian head. Maybe one o' yo' can do better here 'n I can," drawled the colonel, once more turning to his companions.

"No, suh," spoke up Tim. "Yo're all set an' we can try it later. Go ahead, pop!"

"Just as yo' say, then," responded the colonel.

Still he did not fire. In their impatience Jim Paget was about to offer to shoot, but at that instant the colonel's finger pressed the trigger and Old Bess spoke. The report was almost deafening. For a moment Jim Paget clapped his hands upon his ears as if his eardrums had been rent.

Instantly, however, he dropped his hands and leaned forward to watch Colonel Bludworth, who had hastily withdrawn Old Bess and with his spy-glass was gazing at Market Wharf in the distance.

"Something's happened there," he drawled. "Looks 's if somebody had had an accident. There's a man down right in the middle o' th' crowd an' they're all runnin' 'round like a hen with her head cut off. What d'yo' s'pose th' matter is?"

No one replied to the colonel's question. All three boys were pressing forward, eager to peer out of the porthole and discover what the effect of the shot had been in the assembly on the wharf. Colonel Bludworth stepped back to permit his young companions to look and at once they all peered out of the opening.

"There's somebody down, as shore's yo're born!" exclaimed Tim excitedly.

"Looks as if it might be more'n one," said Jim Paget. "That couldn't be, though," he added.

"They're lookin' all 'round tryin' toe see where th' shot came from," suggested Tim.

Several men on the wharf were running to different points and gazing earnestly up and down the river and across the stream to the opposite shore. Apparently none discovered the place from which the shot had been fired, and the confusion in the assembly increased.

"Shore there wasn't any smoke from Old Bess, pop?" asked Tim anxiously.

"I'm shore the' was smoke," answered the colonel, "but the's just enough breeze toe blow it away before they'd see it."

If the actions of the assembly provided any evidence, then the colonel's statement was correct, for the startled men were looking in every direction except the one from which the shot had come. Up and down the river and across to the opposite shore the men were looking, but Negro Head Point apparently did not occur to any as the hiding place of the sharpshooter. Plainly, it was too far distant to be thought of in that connection.

"Shall we give 'em another one?" asked Tim eagerly.

"Let me see," said the colonel, as at once he advanced and looked long and carefully through the porthole. "They haven't left th' wharf yet," he said slowly. "I don't know but we'd better try one more. Think one o' yo' boys could do th' job?" he inquired quizzically.

"Yas, suh! Yas, suh!" said Tim eagerly. "Let me try it."

The colonel, who meanwhile had been reloading Old Bess, at once handed the huge rifle to his son. Tim thrust the barrel through the porthole and aimed at the distant body of men assembled on the wharf.

As the gun now had a firm support it was not as difficult to take aim as it had been when he had

been compelled to hold the weapon at arm's length. Tim was taking his time and it was long before at last he pulled the trigger.

Once more Old Bess spoke. The noise of the report again was almost deafening. The very tree almost seemed to be shaken to its base and to be trembling like a leaf.

Quickly, however, the eager boys again were peering through the porthole to discover the effect of the shot. For a moment no one spoke and then Jim Paget exclaimed, "'Y' got one, Tim."

"Looks like y' did," joined in the colonel. "Stirred 'em up anyway."

Once more the assembly was thrown into dire confusion. Men were running about on the wharf, some apparently giving their attention to one of their number who was lying on the planks, while others were repeating their efforts to discover the place or even the direction from which the mysterious shot had been fired.

As the confusion continued it became evident that their efforts were futile. Several were pointing down the river while others were equally demonstrative in pointing in the opposite direction.

"They aren't goin' toe find out any more right now," chuckled the colonel. "They're goin' toe leave. They're carryin' off two men who look like they don't feel right peart."

All now could see that Colonel Bludworth had spoken truly. Two parties were carrying men whom they lifted carefully and were withdrawing

from the wharf. It was plain that all were highly nervous and eager to escape from the spot before another shot should be fired by the mysterious enemy.

"Doesn't anybody 'pear toe s'pect Nigger Head Point," said Tim enthusiastically.

"Not yet, son," responded the colonel. "It's too soon toe be crowin' yet, though."

"Yo' think they'll find us?"

"Can't say as toe that. If we stay here long 'nough they prob'ly will."

"How long are we toe stay?"

"That depends."

"Depends on what?" persisted Tim. "If th' Tories stay there I don't see any reason why we can't stay here."

"We can stay for a while," assented the colonel. "But we mustn't stay too long. Th' is such a thing as wearin' out yo' welcome."

"We shore don't want toe do that," laughed Tim. "Th' Tories have left th' wharf an' I'm hungry," he added simply.

"I reckon we're all ready for a snack," assented the colonel. "We'll give th' Tories a breathin' spell."

One of Aunt Judy's baskets of food was at once produced and the boys seated themselves, their legs dangling over the edge of the platform as they ate.

"What d' yo' think th' Tories'll do next?" inquired Jim Paget.

"Hard toe tell," replied the colonel quietly.

"But what do yo' *think* they'll do?" persisted the boy.

"I reckon they're holdin' some sort o' a pow-wow right now."

"D' yo' s'pose they'll try toe find out where th' shots come from?"

"That's what yo' all would do if yo' was in their places, wouldn't yo'? Well, then, it's only natural toe s'pose they'd do pretty much th' same thing."

"Yas, suh, but how'll we find out what the' are plannin'?"

"Just wait, that's 'bout all. If they've got any plan, then they'll have toe show it. I'm of th' 'pinion, though, that they've put off one thing the' was a-goin' toe do."

"What's that?"

"They won't be settin' my place on fire—not yet."

"Yo' don't b'lieve they'll give that up, do yo'?"

"I didn't say they'd give it up. I said they'd put it off, that's all."

"Maybe the' won't start from the wharf," suggested Tim.

"That's correct. Maybe the' won't," assented Colonel Bludworth.

"Then 'bout all we can do for a while is toe wait an' watch out for 'em," said Jim Paget.

"For a spell, yas, suh. I reckon, though, we shan't have toe wait so dreadful long."

"I've been a-thinkin'," said Jim Paget thought-

fully, "that it might not be a bad thing for me toe try toe get into Wilmington again. Maybe I could slip past th' guard an' if I could once get into th' old town I might be able toe find out something."

"How would yo' do it?" inquired the colonel thoughtfully.

"By goin' a bit upstream I reckon I could find a landin' place somewhere an' then I could slip through into th' town. I don't b'lieve there's a guard all 'round it."

"Likely not."

"Nobody would take me fo' a spy or anything," continued Jim Paget. "I reckon there's not many that know who I am anyway. I'd just be a boy, yo' see, an' nobody'd take me toe be one o' th' party that's makin' Old Bess sing her pretty tunes toe 'em."

"I reckon yo're correct, boy," said the colonel after a brief silence. "It certainly would be a mighty good thing fo' us if yo' all could find out what th' Tories was a-plannin' toe do. Y' might get toe see Sim this time."

"I'll try it," said Jim Paget eagerly. "When shall I start?"

"Yo' want toe be mighty careful toe keep away from Market Wharf," suggested Tim.

"I reckon that would depend on who's shootin'," laughed Jim Paget. "Now if 'twas Colonel Bludworth firin' Old Bess, yo' all wouldn't

see me within gunshot o' th' wharf. But if 'twas some other——''

''Meanin' me?'' interrupted Tim.

''I'm not namin' any names,'' said Jim Paget. ''But I'll steer clear o' th' wharf,'' he added. ''Yo' all can rest easy 'bout that.''

''I've been thinkin' 'bout when yo' ought toe start,'' spoke up Colonel Bludworth.

''When is th' best time?''

''I reckon it won't make much difference. One time's 'bout as good 's 'nother.''

''Then I'll go right now,'' exclaimed Jim Paget, leaping to his feet as he spoke.

''Hold yore horses, Jim Paget. The' isn't any fret. Let's see what yo' plannin' toe do an' how yo' goin' t' do it.''

''I haven't thought much 'bout that. I reckon I'll paddle across th' river an' land somewhere an' then go on toe Wilmington on foot.''

''Yo' mustn't make 'em suspicion there's anybody 'round Nigger Head Point.''

''How can I help it?''

''That's just what we all got toe figure out. First off, how far is th' canoe from here?''

''Not more'n a hundred yards.''

''If yo' should put out here at th' cove somebody might spy yo'. The doggone traitors will certainly be watchin'.''

''I'll tell yo', said Tim quickly. ''Jim Paget better creep 'long th' shore an' go upstream

'bout a quarter o' a mile. There's plenty o' bushes on th' banks an' he can hide 'most anywhere. Maybe I better go with him," he suggested abruptly.

"No, suh," responded the colonel instantly. "One boy is a boy an' two boys is only half a boy. Besides th' one that goes may have toe act pretty sudden if th' Tories should happen toe spy him. Couldn't stop toe talk it over, he'd just have toe act an' be quick 'bout it. No, suh, we need one o' yo' right here toe help. I reckon it's better fo' Jim Paget toe go an' he might's well go now's any time. Yo' know what yo're goin' fo', don't yo'?" he added, addressing the lad.

"Yas, suh."

"Come back just's soon as yo' get what yo're goin' for. An' be sure toe get yore bearin's before yo' start so's yo' can find th' hole an' th' tunnel again. That's mighty important, yo' understand. Well, if yo're ready we'll let yo' down by th' rope."

Immediately the entire party arose and preparations were at once begun for the departure of Jim Paget.

CHAPTER IX

INTO WILMINGTON

AS soon as Jim Paget touched the ground he released himself, gave the signal and the rope was drawn to the platform. Without delay, he crawled into the tunnel and soon arrived at the exit.

As he stepped out upon the firm ground he became aware of the numerous footprints in the ground about the spot. Apparently every one in the little band had left his mark. The discovery of these by the Tories would instantly suggest to them that several men had crawled into the hole, and if the men at Wilmington were making a thorough search doubtless they would find the telltale marks.

The thought was disquieting, but Jim Paget did not delay. First looking about him to assure himself that he was not seen by any lurking searching party, he was speedily convinced that no one was near. The scene was peaceful all about him. Not a sound except the noise of certain insects broke in upon the silence of the summer day. The sun seemed to be hanging motionless in the sky. A slight haze rested upon the river in the distance, but otherwise there was nothing seen to indicate

that the quiet of the afternoon was threatened. War seemed to be as foreign to the scene as if it did not exist. Tories and Dutch butchers apparently had no part in the July afternoon.

In spite of the appearance, however, Jim Paget was fully aware that he had entered upon a perilous venture. Whether or not Tories could be seen, there was no question as to their presence in Wilmington and the hostile purpose upon which they were bent. And his task was to discover, if possible, what the effect of Old Bess's efforts had been and whether or not the Tories were discouraged. The very lives of his friends in the fortress in the treetop depended upon the success of his venture and upon whether or not the Tories were making a determined effort to ascertain the location of the spot from which the mysterious shots had been fired.

Mindful of these things, Jim Paget cautiously advanced toward the hiding place of the canoe. When he arrived he found the little craft where they had left it. Apparently no one had been near or discovered its presence.

After he had once more looked carefully in every direction Jim Paget cautiously stepped into the canoe, and grasping the paddles, took his position in the stern. Occasionally he pushed against the marshy shore, but for the most part he paddled softly until he entered the river.

Again looking keenly up and down the stream, he satisfied himself that as yet he had not been

seen by his enemies and then cautiously and slowly he drove the frail craft upstream, all the time keeping close to the shore and frequently stopping for observation.

He had advanced two hundred yards or more when he abruptly stopped. Coming swiftly down the stream were two rowboats, each containing two men, and both were rowing. One of the boats was near the shore while the other was farther out in the stream.

Instantly Jim Paget sent his canoe behind some overhanging bushes growing along the bank. He was fearful that his presence had been discovered, but as he peered through the tangled brush he was soon convinced that he had not been seen.

The skiff which was nearer the shore soon was directly in front of him and he was again for a moment alarmed when the rowers rested upon their oars. It speedily became evident that they had no suspicions that an enemy was near, for he distinctly heard the conversation which ensued.

"I told yo'," one of the men said to his companion, "that it was foolish to go so far upstream. No rifle in th' world could carry as far as this."

"Yo' don't s'pose th' rifle belongs toe somethin' out o' the world, do yo', Jed?"

The name instantly recalled to the excited Jim Paget the companion of John Casler when they had searched him in the fish house. He speedily was convinced that the man who had just been called Jed by his companion was indeed the same

man who had been with John Casler in the fish house. The fact was speedily ignored, however, when Jim Paget discovered that he could hear the conversation, and, trembling in his eagerness, he leaned forward and listened intently.

" 'Course not," the man called Jed was saying. "Ghosts don't shoot in th' daytime."

"Well, tell me who did th' shootin', then?"

"That's just what we're tryin' toe do. An' we'll find out too just's shore's yo're born. John Casler has gone down th' river while we've been a-comin' upstream——"

"If he doesn't find any more'n we have he won't report very much," interrupted Jed's comrade.

"Nobody may be able toe find out first off, but some o' us'll sho'ly get him." Jed spoke as if he was firmly convinced that his statement was true, a conviction that Jim Paget, trembling behind the bushes, devoutly shared as well as feared at the moment.

"Beats all where those shots could 'a' come from," Jed was saying thoughtfully.

"Yo're correct 'bout that," assented the second man. "That's what made me think they might 'a' been fired by spooks."

"Shucks!"

"Well, suh, yo' can 'shucks' all yo' want toe! Tell me how in broad daylight two shots can be fired right into th' middle o' th' gang on th' wharf an' nobody can see or smell a sign o' powder or

see a bit o' smoke anywhere 'long th' shore or on th' river."

"I'll own up it's mighty queer," acknowledged Jed, "but we all ain't done with 'em yet awhile. Right soon they'll shoot once too many times an' then we'll get 'em."

"Yas, suh, after he's picked off a lot more o' our friends."

"Yo' all gettin' scared?"

"Yas, suh, I be, an' I don't mind sayin' so."

"Yo'll feel a sight better soon. We'll get these fellows."

"Yo' think there's more'n one doin' th' shootin'?"

"I sho'ly do. 'Tisn't likely one man would come alone toe fight th' lot."

"If it is a *man*."

"Keep up your grit! Yo' aren't done fo', yet awhile. We'll keep on an' we'll get 'em."

The conversation abruptly ceased and the men resumed their rowing. Jim Paget watched them as long as they remained within sight. It was evident from their words that Old Bess had done her duty and created consternation in the assembly on Market Wharf. In spite of his fear, Jim Paget smiled as he recalled the suggestion of Jed's companion that the gun was not fired by an earthly shooter. It reminded him of the tales told by the negroes.

The lad, however, did not waste any time on

further surmises, and as soon as the two boats disappeared he paddled his canoe into the open stream. He had decided now that a bold course was the safer. Accordingly, putting forth all his strength, he started for the opposite shore.

There was neither time nor opportunity to stop for observations. Almost desperately he exerted himself and drove the light little craft swiftly across the water. At any moment he expected to hear the report of a gun or hear a voice summoning him to stop or turn back. As he drew nearer the shore his fears increased, but when at last he landed and turned to look behind him there were no living objects to be seen save a few birds flying low in the distance.

Somewhat relieved, Jim Paget drew the canoe into a secluded spot and then, noting several of the near-by trees so that he would be able to find the place easily, he turned toward the road which, as he was somewhat familiar with the region, he knew was not far away.

He soon arrived at the rough roadway and started at once toward Wilmington, which was not more than three miles distant. The fact that he had not seen any guard or patrol on the river did not mean that none had been established on land. As he proceeded he maintained a careful outlook, but at last when he entered the town he had not seen any soldiers.

Convinced that the bolder course still was safer, he decided to go at once to Sim Miller's cobbler

shop as if it were an ordinary visit. His great fear was lest he might see John Casler or some Tory from the vicinity who would recognize him as Colonel Bludworth's bound boy. In that event he would confront fresh troubles which simply must be met in the best way possible. Meanwhile he was walking slowly toward the cobbler's shop.

Jim Paget soon discovered that his coming apparently had not aroused any interest or created any commotion. He was not nearly as important as he believed himself to be, he thought with a feeling of elation. There was nothing he desired more than to make his way without any trouble to Sim Miller's shop. Once there, he was confident his errand would be accomplished speedily and he would be free to return to the fortress in the old cypress tree.

He saw only a few people moving about the streets of the quaint old town, and not one there did he recognize. On the other hand, the men whom he saw apparently did not bestow a second thought upon the country boy. To them he was apparently just an ordinary lad of the place and his quiet bearing did not arose any suspicion. If he should chance to meet John Casler or any man he knew he was well aware that his troubles instantly would begin.

A brief walk brought Jim Paget to the little side street where the cobbler's shop was located. He peered about him and then looked within the shop to assure himself that no one was observing him

and then, satisfied that he was not being followed, he boldly pulled the latchstring and entered. Before him he saw Sim Miller seated on his bench, pounding on a strip of leather.

The cobbler looked up as Jim Paget entered and for a moment stared blankly at his visitor. He was a small man, about sixty years of age. His head was bald and his face was covered with a scraggly beard. The odor of leather filled the room, and the pungent smell of a ball of black wax, for which Sim Miller reached just as the lad opened the door, was noticeable above the prevailing perfume of the room.

"What yo' doin' here?" demanded Sim Miller, when at last he broke the tense silence.

"I came toe see yo'."

"That's a mighty risky thing toe do. Don't yo' know what's goin' on in Wilmington?"

"No, suh, I don't. That's just what Colonel Bludworth sent me toe find out."

"S-s-s-h!" warned the cobbler, as he arose from his bench and looked out through the windows, of which there were two, one on each side of the room, to satisfy himself that no one was near. "There's a heap o' things goin' on in old Wilmington, and I reckon we all have got troubles enough o' our own without th' colonel givin' us any more. Where's the colonel now?"

"I can't tell yo'."

"Y' mean yo' won't tell me. That's all right,

I reck'n. Maybe I'm better off not t' know too much. Where did yo' all come from?"

"I haven't time t' talk 'bout that. Just tell me what's goin' on here in Wilmington."

"Yo' know th' Tories have been a-gatherin' here fo' th' past two or three days——"

"Yas, suh, yas, suh, I've done heard that," broke in Jim Paget impatiently. "What I want toe find out is just what they're doin'."

"Just now their kettle is in th' fire. They had their drums an' fifes an' there was a meetin' a little while ago on Market Wharf. The' was plannin' toe start out—leastwhile some o' 'em was toe go—but just befo' the' started somethin' happened that broke up th' meetin'."

"What was it?" Jim Paget was fully aware that the keen eyes of the cobbler were gazing shrewdly at him, but he was doing his utmost to appear unmindful of the curiosity of the little man, who loved gossip even more than he did his food.

"One o' 'em was shot. Nobody heard the sound o' a gun, there wasn't any smoke anywhere toe be seen, an' yet there was a man down kerplunk an' nobody knew where th' bullet come from."

"How did the' know 'twas a gun if the' didn't see anything or hear any firin'?"

"Why, there was a man down, the' was a bullet hole in his shoulder an' the' got th' bullet. Some say 'twas mos' as big 's a cannon ball. Then

that wasn't all o' it. Pretty quick the' was another o' those still shots an' another man tumbled. He was hurt pretty bad, I hear. An' the' was another bullet just like th' first one, so the' all knew 'twas one party makin' all th' trouble. The're all pretty much stirred up 'bout it, so I hear."

"What are the' doin' 'bout it?" Jim Paget's eyes were shining in spite of his efforts to appear indifferent to the tale the cobbler was telling.

"The're mad's a wet hen. The're lookin' everywhere fo' th' party what did it."

"Where are the' lookin'?"

"Mos' everywhere. The're seachin' th' town, breakin' open houses——"

"Have the' been here yet?" interrupted Jim Paget hurriedly.

"Some one was here a little spell ago.'

"Will the' come again?"

"No man can say 's toe that. The're all het up an' may do 'most anything. The're bound an' determined toe run th' party down. What yo' so int'r'sted in that part fo'?"

"Go on with yore story."

"Th' isn't much more toe tell. I hear the've sent some boatloads up and likewise down th' Cape Fear, a-lookin' for likely hidin' places."

"The' don't have toe look very far. Yo' said the' was rifle bullets——"

"No, suh, I didn't say anything o' th' kind," broke in the cobbler. "All I said was that th'

bullet was mos' 's big 's a cannon ball. What do yo' all think 'bout it?"

"How should I know? Go on an' tell th' rest o' yore story."

"That's 'bout all the' is toe tell. The' do say, though, that if the' catch th' party, the'll make short work of him."

"Then the' think it's only one man, do they?"

"The' don't say. All the're sure of is that both shots was fired by th' same rifle. Y' see th' two bullets was th' same size an' bein' so big th' Tories concluded 'twas th' same one that did th' damage in both cases."

"How did yo' all find that out?"

"I told yo' some o' th' Tories was here a spell ago."

"Do the' suspicion you?"

"Not toe my knowledge. The're seachin' ev'rywhere an' ev'rybody, that's 'bout all."

"Do the' expect toe try toe start out again?"

"Toe do what the' was plannin' first off toe do?"

"Yas, suh."

"I can't say. At th' same time if I was in Colonel Bludworth's shoes I don't b'lieve I'd let 'em find me very far from home fo' a few days." Again the cobbler glanced quizzically at the boy, but without eliciting any response to his suggestion.

"Is John Casler doin' much?"

"He's one o' th' leaders. I hear tell how he's one o' th' worst. The' say he is mighty anxious toe take a few men up th' river toe visit th' colonel."

"Th' doggone traitors!" exclaimed Jim Paget. "The' ought toe hang ev'ry one o' 'em!"

"S-s-s-h!" warned Sim Miller again, rising and peering anxiously through the windows. "Yo' may have a perfect right toe feel that way but yo' don't ought toe talk much 'bout it. Th' walls may have ears, yo' understand."

"I don't care! I don't care who knows it nor who hears it!" said Jim Paget sharply.

"But yo' must be careful—in my shop. If th' Tories s'picioned I was a-talkin' right now toe Colonel Bludworth's boy, I reckon my days o' makin' boots would be 'bout ended. Where did yo' say th' colonel is now?"

Jim Paget did not answer the cobbler's question. When Sim Miller looked again at the lad he saw that he was staring at something he had discovered outside the little building. When the cobbler arose from his bench and peered through the window to discover what had interested his visitor he was as startled as the lad.

Not more than thirty feet away he saw John Casler, accompanied by two men whom he did not recognize, approaching the shop. It was manifest that the Tory was coming, and there was only a moment in which to act.

"Here yo', Jim Paget!" said Sim Miller instantly. "Get yo'self into this cubbyhole."

As he spoke the cobbler flung open the door of a closet in the rear of the room and pushed the lad into it. He barely had time to throw a side of leather over him and then to close and "button" the low door, when the latchstring of the outer door was pulled and John Casler advanced into the room.

"We've come fo' yore visitor," said the Tory in a loud voice. "Yo' all tell us where he is or it'll go hard with yo', yo' sneakin' rebel!"

CHAPTER X

THE PURSUIT

INSTANTLY there arose a great commotion in the little shop. Enraged by the attitude of the cobbler, who did not make any resistance and did not respond to the questions and taunts of his visitors, John Casler seized him by his shoulder and flung him across the room. The long bench was overturned, the knives and tools were flung out through the open door, even the windows were smashed as the furious visitors flung the hammers through them.

"Now will yo' tell us where that sneakin' little bound boy is?" shouted John Casler, as he brutally kicked the prostrate man.

Sim Miller still was silent. He was helpless in the grasp of the Tory, but there was an expression of determination on his sallow face that would have been startling to Jim Paget if he had been able to see it. As it was, the lad was terrified by the commotion and was trembling violently as he crouched lower in his hiding place. He was convinced that the only way to save the life of his friend was to surrender, and he was about to push away his covering and give himself up to the angry Tories.

At that moment, however, the small door of the closet in which he was hiding was flung open, the side of leather was kicked away and the terrified boy was exposed to view.

"Here he is!" shouted one of the Tories, as he seized Jim Paget by his arm and yanked him to his feet. "Here is th' little sneak!"

"Let me have him!" roared John Casler, as he leaped upon the lad and grasped him roughly by the collar. At the same time he struck the boy a violent blow on the side of the head and then dragged him into the room.

"I knew yo' was a-hidin' somewhere 'round these parts!" said John Casler savagely. "I was doggone shore th' colonel had a hand in this business th' minute I heard about th' shootin'. Now then, tell us where he is!" the Tory added, as he twisted the boy's arm until Jim Paget cried out in agony. "Tell us where he is!" repeated the Tory, "or I'll twist yore head off."

In spite of his suffering the bound boy did not speak. He was ready to die, if need be, but he would not betray the man who had been like a father to him, nor would he reveal his hiding place. His lips were tightly pressed together and his expression of pain only intensified the determination that was manifest in his bearing.

"Yo' won't, won't yo'?" shouted John Casler, as again he violently wrenched the lad's arm. "I reckon we'll find a way toe make yo' open yore mouth! Now then I'll give yo' just one more

chance. Will yo' all tell where th' colonel is hidin'?"

Jim Paget shook his head and did not speak.

Still further enraged by the obstinacy of his prisoner, John Casler renewed his efforts to compel him to reveal the place where Colonel Bludworth was concealed. He twisted Jim Paget's arm until the boy cried aloud in his agony. He then struck him a violent blow on his head and kicked him brutally.

"Now will yo' speak?" he shouted. "There won't be 'nough left o' yo' for the crows toe pick at when I'm done with yo'."

But Jim Paget, trembling and suffering, remained speechless.

Suddenly the lad began to strike and kick at his tormentor. He was convinced that the Tory was determined to kill him, and in sheer desperation he was doing his utmost to free himself from the grasp of his enemy.

The action was so unexpected that for a moment John Casler was taken off his guard. As Jim Paget squirmed and kicked he suddenly wrenched himself free and instantly darted toward the open door. There was no plan of escape in his mind, his sole thought was to escape anyhow and anywhere from his savage captors.

He was for an instant aware that John Casler had leaped after him and was also conscious that the Tory had stumbled over one of his comrades

and that the three men were together in a heap on the floor.

Jim Paget, however, did not await the outcome. Exerting all his strength, as he was aware that the advantage he had gained was only momentary, he ran swiftly up the crooked little street or lane, and then instead of continuing into the larger street beyond, he abruptly turned into an alley on his left and did his utmost to increase his speed. Just as he was turning he had a momentary glimpse of his pursuers, who now were swiftly following, and they greeted his change of direction with a loud shout. For an instant it seemed to the fugitive that the Tories were highly elated, but it was impossible then for him to understand the cause.

In a brief time, however, he saw the reason why they were exulting. The alley was a blind one. Directly before him was a stone wall blocking his progress. To the excited boy the wall appeared to be ten or twelve feet high and there were no steps or ladders by which he might ascend. A quick inspection convinced him that there was no escaping by turning either to the left or to the right. Behind him were his pursuers swiftly approaching and in front of him was the apparently impassable barrier. Just why the Tories did not fire upon him was not clear. Perhaps their failure was due to their feeling of confidence that they had trapped him, and when once

more they had him in their grasp they would compel him to disclose the hiding place of Colonel Bludworth.

The recollection of the tortures he had suffered at the hands of John Casler provided a fresh incentive for the desperate lad. It was true the wall appeared to be too high to be scaled and yet that was his sole remaining way of escape. He simply must climb it.

Jim Paget had been maintaining the swiftness of his flight while these thoughts were surging in his mind and now he found himself facing the barrier. Without abating his efforts he instantly leaped upon the wall. His hands grasped a protruding stone, but one of his feet slipped from the narrow lodging place and he fell to the ground. A glance behind him revealed his pursuers not more than thirty feet away. They laughed loudly when he slipped and sheer desperation provided the lad with fresh determination.

Instantly he leaped to his feet and renewed his efforts. With his toes he gained a narrow vantage and then with his hands holding fast to an uncertain little ledge he pulled himself up until he gained a new hold. He repeated the process, although he was in terror lest he again should slip and fall directly into the waiting hands of his enemies, who now were below him and near the wall.

Struggling, wriggling, pulling, climbing, Jim

Paget squirmed up the wall and almost had gained the top when he felt one of his feet grasped by John Casler, who had now come to the wall and instantly jumped for the boy. By one vicious kick Jim Paget contrived to break the hold of the Tory and then he clambered over the top and fell to the ground on the opposite side.

Slightly dazed by his fall, he leaped to his feet and stared stupidly about him. He soon was aware that he was in the back yard of a large place. At his left was a barn from which at that moment emerged a dog and an old black man. Evidently it was the purpose of the latter to protest the sudden invasion, and, as for the dog, it already was showing its hostility by growls and was approaching with the hair on its back rising angrily.

"Call off yore dog, uncle," gasped Jim Paget. "Hide me! Hide me! The Tories are after me. They're just on the other side of the wall."

Whatever the purpose of the negro may have been, he evidently was moved by the lad's appeal. "Yas, suh, come dis way, suh," he said quickly, and at once conducted the boy to what plainly was a harness room. The dog no longer was showing signs of anger, its confidence evidently restored by the attitude of the negro, who quickly led Jim Paget to a large and nearly empty bin which was fastened by a padlock.

Hastily bidding the lad climb in, he replaced the

lock and turned the key just as Jim Paget heard the angry voice of John Casler, who at that moment entered the barn.

"Boy, where's that fellow that climbed th' wall?" demanded John Casler in a loud voice.

"Yas, suh, yas, suh, Cap'n," said the colored man. "Jes' wha' boy is yo' all referrin' toe?"

"The one that climbed over th' wall just now. Yo' saw him! Where did he go? Don't lie toe me, yo' black rascal, or I'll break ev'ry bone in yore body."

"Yas, suh, Cap'n."

"Well, where is he? Be quick 'bout it! Which way did he go?"

"Yas, suh, yas, suh. Ah don' jes'——"

"Which way did he go?" broke in the Tory, too angry now to be reasonable. As he spoke he advanced threateningly upon the negro, apparently unaware of any danger from the dog which, though it was motionless, was watching every action of the enraged man.

"Yas, suh, Cap'n," again began the negro. "Ah was jes' tellin' yo' all that Ah was tryin' toe rec'lect anybody what has clambered dat wall. Was dis yere boy a white boy?"

"Of course he was white."

"Did he hab er rag tied like ober one o' his eyes?"

"Yas. No. I dunno."

"Yas, suh, Cap'n, Ah don' jes' rec'lect seein' any white boy wid er rag tied ober his eye."

"What did yo' say yo' did for, then?" demanded John Casler loudly.

"Yas, suh. Ah understan' as how er white boy wid one eye done up lak' hit was so'——"

"Where is that boy?" thundered the Tory.

"Ah was jes' 'xplainin', suh. Lemme see. Was dis yere boy wearin' er coat——"

"Where is th' boy?" again demanded John Casler.

"Yas, suh, Cap'n. Ah was jes' rec'lectin'——"

"Did yo' see him?"

"Was hit dis mo'nin' what yo' all was 'xpectin' de white boy?"

"I'm not expecting him at all. What I want toe find out is where is he. He climbed that wall 'bout five minutes ago an' if yo' don't tell me which way he went or where he is now I'll repo'te yo' toe yore master an' have yo' all whipped. Where is he?"

"Yas, suh, Ah understan's. What yo' all is er lookin' fo' is a white boy what has his haid all tied up an'——"

John Casler's patience was exhausted. He sprang angrily at the negro, but before he could touch him he was compelled to meet another and different foe. The dog whose patience also apparently was exhausted, with a snarl sprang at the throat of the Tory and instantly John Casler was forced to fight for his life. The dog was large and powerful and as the Tory tried to kick him away it secured a firm grip on his right leg

and all the man's efforts to make him let go his hold were unavailing.

"Hi, there, yo' nigger! Call off yore dog!" roared the Tory.

"Yas, suh, yas, suh, Cap'n," responded the colored man, who was moving slowly about the contestants. "Ah sho'ly don' wan' yo' all toe get bit. Dat Beelzebub when he don' git sta'ted, 'pears lak' he nebber let go. Here yo', Beelzebub," he added, addressing the dog, "wha' fo' yo' wan' toe chaw 'er white man' laig? Le' go dar, Beelzebub! Yo' all sho'ly make me 'shamed!"

"Call off yore dog! Call him off!" shouted the Tory, still unable to break the hold of the animal.

"Yas, suh, yas, suh, Cap'n," responded the negro. "Ah sho'ly does 'polergize. Dat dog nebber had acted lak' dat befo'."

The black man was endeavoring to free the Tory, but the infuriated animal did not heed the abuse which was heaped upon him. He still clung tenaciously to the hold he had secured on the Tory's leg, all the time growling and snarling in a manner that caused Jim Paget to rejoice that he was free from the assaults of the savage animal even if he was locked within close quarters.

At last the negro seized the tail of the dog, but even that did not free the Tory. The three bodies all swung around the floor and the confusion and noise increased. The growls of the dog, the calls

of the negro and the cries of John Casler all were mingled with the sounds of their feet as the trio slipped and scuffled about the barn.

The strange contest continued several minutes, until at last the Tory broke loose and instantly ran to the driveway. Not once did he look behind him as he sped toward the street.

As soon as John Casler disappeared around the corner of the house the negro hastily turned to the bin and freed the excited boy. "Bettah get outer thar befo' yore fren' come back an' fin' yo'," he said simply.

Without replying, Jim Paget hastily climbed out of the bin and stood before the negro. "Keep yore dog away!" he suggested as he glanced apprehensively at the animal which apparently was still suspicious of all strangers.

"Yas, suh. Don' yo' all be scairt. Beelzebub done mak' me 'polergize fo' him. He sho'ly did 'pear toe like de taste o' dat white man. Ah nebber see him act so befo'. He won't bite yo', he jes' showin' how he could tromple on yo' if he was 'er mind toe. 'Pears like yo' bettah be sta'tin'. Ah don' know des whar yo' all is headin' fo', but Ah reckon yo' bettah be on yo' way. Dat white man sho'ly will be a-comin' back an' Ah'm thinkin' yore laigs is quicker now dan dey mought be if dat man get aftah yo' ergin. Now, boy," he added, "don' yo' all try toe tell me nothin'. Ef Ah don' know den Ah des cain't

'xplain toe nobuddy. Yes, suh, yo' all shore wants toe leave dese yere pa'ts an' yo' wants toe sta't right soon."

"Hold yore dog," called Jim Paget as instantly he prepared to accept the advice of the black man.

"Yas, suh, Ah sho'ly will hol' him," assented the negro as once more he seized the huge dog, gripping him with apparent fearlessness by his tail.

A plan already had occurred to the lad which he quickly prepared to execute. Running swiftly down the driveway he darted across the lawn toward the high wall which he had scaled a few minutes before. The safest spot for him for the time being was Sim Miller's cobbler shop. Of this fact he was strongly convinced because the Tories would not suspect him of returning there and also because he might need the help of a friend.

It was now late in the afternoon. The July sun already was low in the western sky and night soon would appear. Whatever he would do he must do quickly.

Against the wall was a large and strong barrel. Running swiftly to this, Jim Paget leaped upon its upturned head and there found that his uplifted hands were at least a foot and a half below the top of the wall.

At that moment the dog broke loose from the grip of the negro and with a savage growl darted at Jim Paget. The sight of the enraged brute

was sufficient to provide the lad with an additional incentive. Instantly he jumped, striving to grasp the edge of the top of the wall.

Once more he succeeded and drew himself up at the moment when the dog arrived at the spot, leaping high against the wall in his effort to seize the foot of the desperate lad. Jim Paget was aware that the dog was whining and crying in his disappointment and also he heard the lament of the colored man, "Beelzebub, Ah sho'ly is mo'ti-fied. Yo' is named c'rectly, fo' yo' sho' is de debbil's own dawg."

Jim Paget, however, did not delay to listen to the lamentations and as soon as he dropped upon the ground he swiftly ran from the alley. He halted a moment when he turned into the lane or street, and then seeing Sim Miller's shop in the distance and trusting that no one was watching him, he ran at top speed for the familiar little building.

When he arrived he burst in through the open doorway and saw the cobbler pounding away on a piece of leather just as he had been doing on the occasion of his former visit.

"Here I am, Sim," exclaimed Jim Paget as he stopped before the cobbler.

"Yas, I reckoned yo'd come back," drawled Sim Miller without ceasing his labor.

"I've had a great time."

"Yas."

"I got away from th' Tory."

"I reckoned yo' did. I s'picioned it when I saw yo' come into th' shop."

"I'm goin' straight back now."

"Straight back where?"

"Where th' colonel an'—where th' colonel is."

"That's right. I reckon I'll go 'long too."

"Yo'll *what?*" demanded Jim Paget in astonishment.

"I'll go 'long with yo'." Sim Miller had arisen from his bench and was laying aside his apron as he spoke.

"But I don't know——"

"I *do,*" interrupted Sim Miller. "I know more'n yo' do an' what's more, Colonel Bludworth wants toe know what I know."

"Can't you tell me and let me tell him?"

"That I can't."

"But I'm afraid. All I've got is a little canoe——"

"That's enough. I'm goin'."

The cobbler quickly put on a coat and hat, and disregarding the evident dismay of Jim Paget, said, "Come on!"

Mystified and somewhat dubious as to the reception Sim Miller would receive in the old cypress tree—that is, if they should succeed in rejoining their friends—the lad made no further protest. As soon as the cobbler closed and locked the door of his little shop, the two started in the direction of the place where Jim Paget had left his canoe.

CHAPTER XI

AN ADDITION

JIM PAGET'S fears for his own safety were increased by the presence of the cobbler. The little shoemaker was a great gossip as well as an inveterate talker. His little shop was a center for distributing news and Sim Miller was never happier than when he was imparting to the men who frequented his place the current tales concerning their neighbors, or was outlining his views as to the defects in the King's government of the Colonies.

For the most part, the cobbler's tales were taken by his hearers at their true value. He simply was loquacious and loved to talk, chiefly for the pleasure it gave him, not for the information of his hearers. It is true he was not malicious and was as free with his reports of good deeds as he was of evil. As a rule his conversation was considered, what it really was, the harmless words of a man more given to talk than to thought.

As the long struggle of the Colonies for their freedom dragged on and the feeling among his neighbors became more tense, and as Sim Miller was an outspoken champion of the rights of the oppressed people, there had been several occa-

sions when he had barely escaped serious trouble. Twice Tories had visited him threatening him with a coat of tar and feathers if he did not better control his tongue, which one of his visitors declared to be "hung in the middle and both ends working."

For a time after such a visit Sim Miller would be somewhat subdued, but his propensity to talk on all subjects and occasions proved to be too strong for him to resist and soon he was at his former occupation, making up for the time he had lost in being good.

The latest assembly of the Tories at Wilmington had provided a fresh incentive to the cobbler and he had been quick to avail himself of it. He had discoursed loudly and long on the wrongs of his fellow patriots until there had come from some unknown source a warning which had alarmed the little man as no previous experience had done.

He did not feel called upon to explain to his companion, as he and Jim Paget walked slowly out of the town, doing their utmost to proceed in such a manner as to avoid arousing the suspicion of any one, that a placard had been left in his shop by some unknown party which had warned him to depart at once. A crude skull and bones had been drawn in charcoal and emphasized the warning printed beneath it.

Sim Miller heeded the call. He decided promptly that it was safer for him to be outside the bounds of Wilmington than to be found

within them. How and where to go were serious questions but the sudden appearance of Jim Paget in his shop had indicated a method of escape and instantly he had acted.

Neither spoke as they advanced, but both were watchful and apprehensive. Sim Miller frequently looked behind him as if he was expecting pursuit. Jim Paget was apprehensive of guards stationed along the roadway and of patrol boats on the river. However, they were not molested, and just as the sun was disappearing from sight they arrived at the place where the lad had hidden his canoe.

"We'll wait here till it's darker," suggested Jim Paget. "Better sit down an' keep quiet."

"I don't want toe wait. I'm feared o' th' Tories. If they should find me——"

"That's just what I'm tryin' toe keep 'em from doin'," interrupted the boy. "Yo' all must keep so still yo' won't hear yore own conscience a workin'. If the' don't find us right soon I reckon pretty quick we'll be in th' place we're a lookin' fo'."

"What place is that?"

"Just what I done told yo'. It's where we all wish we was now."

"There isn't any one on th' river," said the cobbler after a long look up and down the stream.

"Yo' don' know whether the' is or not," retorted Jim Paget.

"Yes, I do. I looked ev'rywhere."

"The's one thing yo' haven't done."

"What's that?"

"Is yore jaw tired?" abruptly demanded Jim Paget.

"Tired? No, suh. I hasn't done nuthin' toe tire it."

"Let it rest, Sim. Let it rest."

"What fo'?"

"For th' good o' th' cause."

"But I'm a friend o' th' cause. I always said I was an' that's th' reason why I got into trouble."

"Trouble? What's troublin' yo', Sim Miller?"

"A good many things."

"Yo'll have a good many mo' if yo' all don't just shut up. Do I make myself clear?"

"Puffickly. But yo're mistaken, boy. I never talk agin th' Colonies. I talk——"

"Yo' shorely do, Sim Miller. Now this is th' place where yo' *don't* talk. Understan' me?"

"But, why——"

"If yo' all lets out another word yo' don't go on with me. Yo' puts straight back toe Wilmington."

"But I don't want toe go back toe Wilmington. I'm er goin' with yo' all."

"Not if yo' say another word."

The warning this time availed. Sim Miller became silent, although on several occasions he threatened to break forth again. A glance at the face of his companion was sufficient to convince

him that Jim Paget was deadly in earnest. The cobbler above all things was desirous of going with him. He did not know where he was going nor did he care. He was positive that the boy soon would rejoin Colonel Bludworth and that fact alone was sufficient. Sim Miller was eager to be with the one man whose protection he most desired.

Jim Paget waited until the dusk deepened before he prepared to depart. As soon as he was convinced that it was measurably safe to proceed, he drew out the canoe and holding it by one hand, bade his companion lie down in the bow, a direction against which Sim Miller vigorously but unavailingly protested; he grasped his paddle, kneeling in the stern of the little craft, and with a few vigorous strokes sent it out upon the water.

The silence resting over the river was tense. Jim Paget frequently rested and glanced in every direction. Apparently there was no one near and he resumed his efforts. Alternately paddling and stopping for observation he continued on his way until at last he gained the shore he was seeking.

He then cautiously pushed the canoe into its former hiding place and bade his comrade arise and follow him.

"Yeow-w!" exclaimed the cobbler as he stepped upon the shore. "I put my foot d'rectly on a snake. It was as big's an oar!"

"I don' care if 'twas big's a cypress tree! If yo' all let out another such yell I'll leave yo' all right

here in th' swamp where yo'll spend th' whole night with snakes," said Jim Paget in a low voice. "Snakes aren't as bad as Tories an' yo' don' know how many o' them may be a hidin' right behind these trees."

"Where? Where?" whispered Sim Miller as he glanced fearfully at the adjacent trees.

"Anywhere an' everywhere. Now yo' all look sharp an' follow me. Watch where yo' step. If yo' don't th' first thing yo' know yo'll be a steppin' right into a soft spot that'll swallow yo' up same's if yo' was a hunk o' lead."

The cobbler became silent, doing his utmost to follow in the footsteps of the lad who now was moving rapidly, eager to rejoin his friends in the fortress in the treetop. Twice the cobbler fell into the thick mud, but Jim Paget yanked him safely to the firmer ground, and bidding him to be more careful, quickly resumed his efforts to discover the hole in the ground.

When at last he arrived at the place he sought he turned to the cobbler and said, "Now yo've got th' toughest job yo' ever had since yo' all were born."

"What is it?" asked Sim Miller in a voice that trembled.

"I gave yo' fair warnin', but come yo' would, so here yo' be."

"What is it? What is it?"

"Yo' got toe crawl under th' ground an' then yo've got toe be h'isted 'bout fifty feet——"

"I won't!" broke in Sim Miller. "I'll go back."

"That's th' way toe talk. I wish yo' had gone back afore yo' started."

"How'll I go?"

"I dunno. I reckon yo' all will find some way."

"I don't know th' way. Where is th' colonel? He'll help me. I know he will."

"I reckon that's right, he's th' only one that can, an' I'm a-goin' toe let him do it. Yo' stay right here where yo' be an' I'll go get him."

"How long'll yo' be gone?"

"Jest a spell. Don't yo' move while I'm gone. If yo' do yo'll be lost an' th' snakes'll get yo'."

Jim Paget instantly whistled, giving the signal which had been agreed upon and then crawled into the opening and began to advance through the tunnel. When he gained the base of the huge cypress and stood erect he saw a faint glimmer of light from the platform above. Otherwise he was in total darkness. His hands were trembling in his excitement and he had visions of snakes approaching over the damp ground.

He repeated the signal and was relieved when he heard a voice from above calling, "Is that yo', Jim Paget?"

"It shore is. Give me that rope an' be quick 'bout it, too."

"Are yo' all right?"

"I reckon I am, but I don' want toe stay here."

"We'll have it down there befo'——"

"Hold on!" Jim Paget called suddenly. "Lower th' colonel. I want him an' I want him right soon."

There was a brief delay before any one responded. Then he heard the colonel say, "I'm comin'! Look out I don't hit yo' when I land."

In a brief time the waiting lad heard the colonel descending and soon he was standing beside him.

"What's wrong? What is it, son?" inquired Colonel Bludworth in a low voice.

"Sim Miller is here," replied Jim Paget. "I didn't want him toe come, but he would do it."

"Where is he?"

"He's out yonder by the hole in th' ground,—th' place where we crawl into th' tunnel."

"What's he doin' there?"

"Just waitin'. I told him I wouldn't let him come in here till I told yo'."

"What does he want?"

"Toe join us."

"Yo' didn't tell him, did yo'?"

"I didn't tell him anything. He knew I come from yo' an' he was determined to jine. He's scared an' I reckon I don't blame him over much. John Casler——"

"Did yo' all see John Casler?" interrupted the colonel.

"I shore did. I had my troubles with him, let me tell yo'. He——"

"Better wait befo' yo' tell me any mo'. I

reckon th' best thing toe do is toe get Sim Miller in here an' let him say his say."

"I'll go out an' tell him," volunteered Jim Paget, "but I'm not shore he'll come back with me. Yo' never see such a scared man in all yo' born days."

"Go get him," said the colonel briefly. "I'll wait fo' yo' right here."

Thus bidden Jim Paget once more entered the tunnel and crawled swiftly to the exit.

He wisely warned the cobbler of his coming by calling in a low voice before he arrived and as a result Sim Miller was kneeling and peering into the dark hole when the lad appeared.

"Yo' there?" whispered Jim Paget as he emerged from the underground passageway.

"Yas, suh," replied the cobbler tremblingly. "Is that yo', Jim Paget?"

"It is," whispered Jim. "Th' colonel says as how yo' all is toe come back with me."

"Me? Go into that hole in th' ground? No, suh. I just cain't do that, nohow."

"Yo' either go in or yo' go back alone an' yo' start right now."

"But I can't go back alone."

"Then follow me into th' hole. I'll go ahead an' all yo' have toe do is toe keep up close toe me."

"Any snakes in there?"

"I didn't see any. It's dark an——"

"Go on. I'll come er long," broke in the terrified cobbler.

"Whatever happens don't yo' all open yore mouth," warned Jim Paget, as immediately he reëntered the tunnel. He waited until he was positive that the cobbler was following him, and then he moved as rapidly as possible through the passage. Occasionally he stopped to make sure that Sim Miller was close behind him. He heard the deep breathing of the frightened man, but it was impossible to make himself heard in the cramped quarters.

Convinced each time that the cobbler was following, Jim Paget resumed his efforts and at last regained the base of the tree where he found Colonel Bludworth awaiting his arrival. The lad assisted the cobbler to stand and whispered to him, "The colonel is here. Now do just what we tell yo' an' don't call out."

"Is that yo' all, Colonel?" asked the cobbler in a loud whisper.

"It shore is. What did yo' come here fo'?"

"I wanted toe see yo'. Yo' all don't know what we uns has toe suffer——"

"I don't want toe know, leastwise not right now. Do yo' know what th' Tories is plannin' toe do?"

"Yas, suh."

"Then yo're sure enough welcome, Sim Miller. Nothin' is er goin' toe hurt yo' but yo' must keep still. I'll send Jim Paget up aloft an' then yo'll

go next. There isn't a bit o' danger but yo' all 'll think yo're bein' yanked up toe th' skies. Don't yo' make a noise whatever happens."

Sim Miller promised to do his utmost to obey, although his terror was plainly manifest in the tones of his voice.

"Better go first, Jim Paget," directed the colonel, "an' then maybe Sim Miller 'll have a little more sand toe follow after yo'."

"Yas, suh, I'll go first," assented the lad as he speedily adjusted the rope and gave the signal. In a moment he was drawn upward. It was too dark to enable his companions to see him, but it was plain that the fears of Sim Miller were not allayed by the mysterious disappearance. Soon the rope was lowered again and Colonel Bludworth assisted in adjusting it to the shoulders of Sim Miller.

The little cobbler was almost in hysterics when the rope tightened and he was lifted into the air. However, he did not make any outcry and the colonel was relieved when the rope was lowered once more and he prepared to make his ascent.

In a brief time he rejoined his friends on the platform where there was a dim light from a single candle. The portholes had been covered but even with that precaution the colonel was fearful lest a chance gleam might reveal their place of concealment.

As soon as their visitor had been shown about the platform, the light was extinguished by the

direction of the colonel, and, seated in the darkness, they listened first to the story of Jim Paget's visit in Wilmington and then to the tale of the cobbler.

The anger of Tim when the bound boy told of the brutality of John Casler was keen, but when Jim Paget described the Tory's fight and flight from the dog he laughed aloud.

"Careful, son," warned the colonel. "John Casler isn't done with us yet. He may be prowlin' 'round outside right now, an' yo' all mustn't let him know where we all be."

"We aren't done with him, either," retorted Tim. "The doggone traitor!"

"Let Sim Miller tell us what he knows an' what he come here fo'," suggested the colonel.

Thus bidden, the cobbler with many words and detailed explanations described conditions in Wilmington. He told of the consternation created by the mysterious shots of Old Bess and how the Tories were planning on the following morning to meet again on Market Wharf for another start on their original project,—the burning of many houses of the patriots in the vicinity. He told how he himself had gone to the wharf and mingled with the assembly, hoping thereby to obtain information that might aid his friends who were devoted to the Colonies. It appeared, however, that John Casler and other Tories, relying upon the Redcoats for support, had threatened him and ulti-

mately had driven him away. Later they had established a watch on his shop, evidently suspicious that the timid little cobbler might warn certain of the parties whose places they were planning to raid.

Doubtless it was in this manner they had learned of the coming of Jim Paget, and recognizing him as the bound boy of Colonel Bludworth, somehow had connected the latter with the mysterious shots that had created havoc in the assembly on Market Wharf.

"An' when do these traitors plan toe start again?" inquired the colonel when the cobbler's tale was told.

"To-morrow mornin' right after sunup," replied Sim Miller whose courage, now that he was in the midst of friends, was somewhat restored.

"That's a good time," laughed Tim. "We'll help 'em get a good start. Think we ought toe keep a guard all night?" he inquired of his father.

"Yas, suh."

"Who'll go on duty first? I'll do it," he added quickly. "Jim Paget has had enough for his share to-day."

"We'll divide th' night into five parts," said Colonel Bludworth. "Now that Sim Miller has joined us he'll be glad toe do his share. He can't get back toe Wilmington anyway until this thing is all settled."

"I'll do my part," responded the cobbler promptly.

"We'll let Lige start in first. Th' others can go toe sleep an' when Lige thinks two hours is up he can call Tim an' Tim can take a couple o' hours an' then call Jim Paget an' he can wake Sim Miller and he can call me. I want toe be 'round befo' sunup so's toe see th' party Sim Miller's been tellin' us is a goin' toe be held on th' old Market Wharf."

"We all want toe be awake then," said Tim quickly.

"Never fear, son. I'll call yo' all. Now then, Lige, yo' open up th' porthole an' be sure toe wake us up if yo' see anything suspicious. Yo' hear me, Lige. I said *anything* suspicious."

"Yas, suh, I sho'ly will," answered the young negro.

"An' th' same way with all th' others."

All faithfully promised to do their best, and in a brief time every one except Lige was sleeping soundly.

CHAPTER XII

OLD BESS SPEAKS AGAIN

THE night passed without any excitement. The air was clear and not a sound broke in upon the stillness. Each member of the party served in turn as watch and was glad when he was relieved, as the monotony made it difficult to remain awake.

Just at sunrise, however, Colonel Bludworth, who was on guard at the time, aroused his companions and as they hastened to peer out through the porthole he said, "It looks toe me as if the traitors were gettin' ready for another meetin' on the wharf."

Jim Paget, who was standing beside Tim said quickly, "They are a-comin', as sure's yo're born. There must be twenty-five there right now."

"The' thought the' could get ahead of us by gettin' up early in th' mornin'," chuckled the colonel. "Old Bess'll have toe show 'em that other folks is early-risers too."

"Is she loaded?" inquired Tim excitedly.

"She shore is," answered his father.

"Let me shoot her then," begged the lad.

"Not this time. Maybe I'll give yo' a chance later."

Neither Tim nor Jim Paget spoke, although the former winked knowingly at the bound boy. Both were thinking of the target of the painted Indian's head at which all three had fired and they recalled that the colonel's shot had been the poorest of them all. It would not do now to remind him of the fact, however, and both boys endeavored to ignore their disappointment, while they watched the colonel as he carefully inspected the priming and then thrust the barrel of the great rifle through the porthole.

To them both Colonel Bludworth seemed to be unnaturally deliberate in his actions. Lige and Sim Miller were standing back but their interest was as keen as that of the others. An expression of fear was manifest on the face of the cobbler but he was too intent on the actions of the colonel to permit it to master him.

"I reckon this is 'bout th' time toe warn 'em toe get off th' wharf," the colonel was saying. "I don't want toe spile their breakfast fo' 'em, but like as not they've had that a long time ago. Speak up, old lady, an' tell th' doggone traitors they mustn't be so naughty."

The colonel was speaking in low tones almost as if he were addressing himself, and as he ended he abruptly pulled the trigger.

There was a report that for a moment seemed almost to rend asunder the very foundations of

the huge cypress. The cobbler uttered a low exclamation but the boys instantly pressed forward to discover the effect of the shot.

"There's one down!" exclaimed Jim Paget. "The're running around like a lot of ants. The're lookin' up an' down th' river! Yes, an' there go four men a carryin' some one off th' wharf."

"Think the'll find us here?" inquired Sim Miller in a voice that trembled.

"No man knows," said the colonel solemnly. "Likely the'll get us sooner or later but right now the' don't 'pear toe locate us. There the' go!" he added. "The're all a-departin' from th' wharf. What d' yo' s'pose the're up toe now?"

"From th' way the're lookin' all 'round an' 'specially behind 'em," laughed Jim Paget, "it doesn't look 's if the'd be any one left on Market Wharf pretty quick."

"Does seem's if the' wasn't very fond o' th' place," drawled the colonel.

"Think the'll come back?" asked the cobbler.

"I reckon the'll come," replied Colonel Bludworth.

"When?"

"If I knew I'd be a lot wiser'n I am now."

"They're all gone now anyway," said Jim Paget. "Some o' 'em 'pear toe be startin' off in boats again. Yo' don't reckon the' saw th' smoke o' Old Bess, do yo'?"

"The' didn't," said the colonel positively. "The' couldn't see it. I took p'ticular pains toe watch out for that. No, suh, Old Bess knows how toe behave better'n that?"

"I'm hungry," spoke up Tim. "Let's eat."

The suggestion instantly met with approval and as soon as Lige had been selected to stand as watchman at the porthole the colonel and Jim Paget opened the baskets which Aunt Judy had packed and a hearty breakfast was enjoyed. The meal had barely been completed, however, when Lige abruptly warned them that matters of interest were taking place on the wharf. "The're comin' back," he declared. "The're in a hurry, too. See 'em, Colonel?"

Instantly all rushed to the porthole and a hasty glance confirmed the statement of the black boy. The Tories were running about the wharf and it was evident plans of unusual importance were in preparation.

"What the' doin'?" whispered Sim.

Colonel Bludworth did not reply as he keenly peered at the assembly. It was plain that he was perplexed by the manifest haste of the Tories, but as yet he was unable to discover the cause.

After a brief delay he reached for Old Bess and said quietly, "I reckon the're tryin' toe get away so quick that the' think there won't be any chance toe fire at 'em. Old Bess'll teach 'em a thing or two 'bout that."

This time he did not delay. Before his com-

panions were fully aware of his intention he aimed and fired.

Instantly the commotion increased on the wharf. Whatever plans the Tories had formed they quickly abandoned them. There was a wild flight from the place and again four men were seen carrying a disabled Tory toward the street.

"That's great!" laughed Tim. "The' don't know where th' trouble comes from but th' isn't any diff'rence o' opinion 'bout it's bein' right on hand."

"Better do yore laughin' right soon, son," said Colonel Bludworth soberly. "Maybe yo' all won't get 'nother chance very soon."

"Yo' think they know where we are?" inquired Tim anxiously.

"I don't reckon the' do—yet."

"Yo' think they'll find us?"

"The're fools if the' don't."

"But how'll the' do it? The' don't know 'bout a gun that can carry as far as Old Bess, an' yo' said yo'self the' didn't see any smoke when yo' shot."

"No more did the'. But that doesn't mean that the' never will find us."

"But how can they find us?" persisted Tim.

"The'll keep a-searchin' an' a-lookin' an' then some time the first thing yo' know the'll spot us right where we be."

"What'll we do then?"

"Do th' best we can."

"How can we get away?"

"We'll just have toe wait an' see. We shan't give up without a fight."

"Why not get away befo' the' come an' find us?"

"It'll be time 'nough fo' us toe decide what we all'll do when th' time comes."

Throughout the excitement Sim Miller had been unusually quiet. He was in great fear, as his pale face and trembling hands bore ample testimony. He had eaten only a little of the breakfast and had made no response to the good-natured raillery of the boys.

All were surprised therefore when the little cobbler suddenly said, "Colonel Bludworth, d' yo' reckon it would be a good thing fo' me toe try toe get back into Wilmington."

"What fo'?" asked Colonel Bludworth sharply. "Are yo' scared toe stay here?"

"I might find out what's goin' on."

"What good would that do us?"

"I might report toe yo'."

"How would yo' all do that?"

"Jim Paget could paddle me 'cross toe th' other side. Then he might wait an' bring me back."

"Wait where?"

"On th' other side."

"How long would yo' be gone, Sim Miller? If John Casler saw yo' he might s'picion yo' was mixed up 'long with us. If he did yo' would have yore troubles."

"So I would," acknowledged the cobbler humbly. "But it's worth tryin'. If yo' all could know what th' Tories are plannin' toe do next, yo'd be a sight better off. Fo' all yo' know they may be settin' out by land toe burn yore place."

The suggestion was somewhat startling and for a brief time Colonel Bludworth was silent. "I reckon the's somethin' in what yo' say, Sim Miller. What do yo' say?" he added, turning to Jim Paget as he spoke.

"I'm willin'," said the lad simply.

"Better let me go this time,' suggested Tim. "Jim Paget went th' other time."

"It's better fo' Jim Paget toe go if any one goes," said the colonel. "Just because he went befo' is th' very reason why he's th' one toe go now. He's had a chance toe find out what not toe do. That's a good half o' th' battle in a fight like this."

A brief discussion followed and it was soon decided that Jim Paget should paddle the cobbler across the river and after landing him should conceal his canoe and await his return. They decided also that the attempt should be made at once. It was early morning and doubtless the thoughts of the Tories would be upon the strange shots which had scattered the assembly on Market Wharf. If Jim Paget could succeed in helping the cobbler land before the fresh search which they were certain to make, then an additional advantage would be obtained, as the Tories would discuss various

measures before they undertook new plans to discover the hiding place of the mysterious enemy that four times had scattered the crowd which had assembled on the old wharf.

Jim Paget and the cobbler were at once lowered to the ground and Sim with fear and trembling followed the bound boy as he crawled through the tunnel. Sim Miller had promised faithfully that he would not talk, and as he now was aware of the peril of the attempted return to Wilmington his friends were hopeful that his fear would restrain his tendency to talk too much or at an inopportune moment.

After they emerged from the underground passage Jim Paget first looked all about to assure himself that they were not observed, then convinced that no one was watching, he bade his companion follow him and swiftly led the way toward the place where he had concealed his canoe. This time the cobbler only once slipped and fell into the mud. He was a sorry object to behold when Jim Paget dragged him out, but no time was wasted in trying to make him presentable. The necessity of haste was urgent and Sim Miller stumbled forward, doing his utmost to move safely and silently as he followed the active lad.

They found the canoe where they had left it, and apparently they had not been seen when they drew it forth and took their places on board the frail little craft. The winding, narrow little creek, down which they were moving, was nearly

covered by the branches of the bushes that grew rank on either side. Even where the stream entered the river the growth was so rank that it would have been difficult for one not familiar with the spot to find the place. Indeed, Colonel Bludworth had chanced upon it on one of his fox hunts and had noted the landmarks more because of curiosity than from a belief that he would ever need to find a refuge there.

As Jim Paget drew near the place where the creek flowed into the larger stream his precautions increased. He was paddling slowly and silently, occasionally glancing at the cobbler as if to renew his appeal for silence. Sim Miller, however, was in such fear that his companion's warning was not required. There was an expression of alarm on his countenance and he was leaning forward as if he was helping every effort of the paddler.

Just before he arrived at the river Jim Paget drew in his paddle and placed it within easy reach on the bottom of the canoe. Then grasping the overhanging boughs, he slowly and cautiously drew the canoe forward, all the time listening intently for sounds that might betray the presence of his enemies. The bow was within the shelter of the brush when the lad gained a place from which he was able to look out over the broad waters before him.

Instantly he pulled the canoe back and placed his fingers for a moment on his lips, silently warning his companion. Not a word was spoken as

Jim Paget peered through the brush at a sight which plainly had alarmed him.

He shook his head at Sim Miller whose unspoken question was evident in the expression of his eyes. Jim Paget remained silent, peering eagerly through the bushes before he turned again to the cobbler and whispered, "There's a skiff out there with four men in it."

"Comin' or goin'?" whispered Sim Miller.

"Comin'."

"What fo'?"

"I dunno. The's only one man a rowin'."

A brief silence followed and then Jim Paget whispered, "The're goin' toe land."

"Where?"

"Down shore, 'bout a hundred an' fifty yards. Yes, the're landin' shore's yo're born. No, only one has gone ashore. Th' others are comin' on. The're headed this way. The're creepin' close in shore. I wonder what the' put one o' 'em ashore fo'."

"Maybe he's goin' toe creep up behind us an' cut us off."

"The' don't know we all are here. I know what the're a-doin'," suddenly exclaimed Jim Paget in a loud whisper.

"What the' doin'?"

"The're a-puttin' these men ashore toe be on th' watchout for th' place where th' men that's firin' Old Bess are hidin'. Yas, suh, that's their plan exactly. The're a-goin' toe leave men all 'long the

shore and then when th' next shot is fired some one o' 'em'll be able toe tell just where it's located. There isn't any need o' yore goin' back toe Wilmington," he added, "we all have found out already just what th' doggone traitors are tryin' toe do. Th' thing for us toe do is toe put straight back an' tell th' colonel. Th' first thing we know the'll have a line all 'long this shore an' th' colonel won't be able toe fire Old Bess an' we all'll be shut up here just exac'ly like a lot o' rats caught in a trap."

"Goin' back right away or goin' toe stay here a spell an' watch th' Tories?"

Jim Paget hesitated a moment and then said, "That's a good idea. We'll stay right where we be an' find out what more's goin' on."

The lad once more pulled the canoe forward to a place from which he was able to see what was occurring on the river. He did not report to his companion, although his intense interest in what he saw indicated plainly that stirring events were taking place.

For a half-hour Jim Paget remained and then abruptly began to pull the little canoe back up the creek.

"The' landed all three o' th' other men," he explained when the canoe was restored to its hiding place.

"Scatter 'em all?"

"Yes. The' left th' men not more'n two hundred yards apart."

"D' yo' s'pose the've done th' same thing on th' other shore?"

"Prob'ly, an' it's more'n likely the've done th' same thing 'long th' shore below th' wharf. The've made up their minds I reckon that whoever is firin' at 'em is outside th' town. The're on th' right road now. It's just as th' colonel said, the'll find out if we keep it up long 'nough."

"Why don't we all get out then right now?"

"I reckon it's too late."

"What? D' yo' mean toe say we're caught in that old cypress?" demanded the cobbler in great excitement.

"Yo' aren't in it now, Sim Miller. The's no one forcin' yo' toe go back thar' if yo' don't want toe go."

"I'm a-goin'," said the cobbler positively.

"That's good, but yo'll have toe take yore chance 'long with th' rest o' us."

"I'm a-goin' an' I'm a-goin' right now," repeated the cobbler as he turned to the pathway.

"Better let me go ahead," suggested Jim Paget. "I know the way better'n yo' do, though I reckon yo' all can show me th' mudholes."

As soon as the lad had once more looked to the safety of the canoe he turned quickly into the way that led to the huge cypress. He was eager now to inform Colonel Bludworth of his discovery and learn what was next to be done.

CHAPTER XIII

THE APPROACH OF THE TORIES

IN their eagerness both Jim Paget and the cobbler soon arrived at the base of the cypress tree and at once crawled into the underground passage. Fear of snakes was now ignored and in their zeal to report to the colonel, even the Tories were for the moment forgotten. They must inform their companions that their enemies had devised a plan which threatened their safety and might endanger their lives.

Jim Paget was the first to give the signal and was swiftly drawn to the platform. Without waiting for Sim Miller to join him, the excited boy said to Colonel Bludworth, "Th' Tories will get us!"

"The' haven't got us yet," drawled the colonel. His manner of speech, however, did not conceal his anxiety and for the time, unmindful of the repeated signals of the cobbler below, the excited band crowded about Jim Paget, eager to hear his report. "Tell us about it, son," suggested the colonel, as soon as the bound boy recovered his breath.

"We was just pushin' out into th' river," Jim

Paget explained, "when I saw a boat with four men in it. In a little while the' landed one o' th' men on th' shore an' then rowed on 'bout a hundred yards an' landed another. Then the' put th' third man just 'bout as far from th' second man as th' second was from th' first an' th' man who was rowin' began toe pull back for Wilmington."

"What did the' land th' three men fo'?" inquired Tim. "I don't see."

"Jim Paget thinks the' have stationed these men as lookouts or guards," explained the colonel. "Is that it?" he inquired of the bound boy.

"That's it exac'ly. The' are a-goin' toe have men all along either shore o' th' river an' when Old Bess speaks again the' think some one o' 'em'll be able toe locate th' man that's firin' her."

"That's bad fo' us," said Tim.

"It shore is," continued Jim Paget. "I don't see any other way fo' us except toe get away from here right soon."

"Do yo' want toe leave?" inquired the colonel quietly.

"I don't want 'em toe catch me here like a rat in a trap."

"S'pose th' rest o' us want toe be caught?" demanded Tim quickly.

"I dunno. I reckon I hadn't thought much 'bout it."

"Well, we don't, an' what's more we all don't intend toe be caught! Do we, pop?" demanded Tim, turning to his father as he spoke.

"I don't want any one toe stay here unless he wants toe," said the colonel.

"I'm not plannin' toe leave yo'," spoke up Jim Paget. "My 'pinion is that we all better get out. If we can't shoot with Old Bess the' won't be much toe gain by stayin'. We'd better be startin' while we can get out o' here. There's that cobbler," he added hastily, as a renewed call from Sim Miller came from the base of the tree. "I declare, I'd 'most forgotten 'bout him."

Jim Paget hastily lowered the rope and the little cobbler, protesting vigorously against the neglect to heed his former signals, was drawn to the platform. His presence, however, was ignored and the conversation continued.

"We're here," said the colonel, "an' in my 'pinion it's safer toe stay here than it is toe try toe get away yet awhile. We may have toe give up our shootin' for a spell, but——"

The colonel was interrupted by an exclamation from Lige, who was looking out of the porthole. "The' is er comin' back!" he exclaimed in a low voice.

"Who's er comin'?" demanded the colonel as he advanced quickly to the side of the black boy.

One look was sufficient to confirm the statement Lige had made. On Market Wharf several men were to be seen. Their activities, however, were very different from those of the preceding assemblies. Not more than a half dozen men were there now and they were running about on the

wharf, the actions betraying either their fears or that some new project was in their minds.

"The' 'pear toe be a bit nervous," chuckled Colonel Bludworth, as he reached for his gun. "We all must try toe soothe their troubled feelin's."

"Yo' aren't goin toe shoot, are yo'?" asked Tim hastily.

"I shore am."

"But th' guards may spot yo'."

"Can't help that. Have toe take some chances in this troubled world."

"What'll yo' do if the' spy us?"

"Decide that when th' time comes. Just now I'm a-goin' toe let 'em have it. If 'twasn't so important I'd let one o' you boys shoot her. As it is, I reckon I'd better be th' one."

As he spoke Colonel Bludworth thrust the barrel of the huge rifle through the porthole and raised the stock to his shoulder. To the waiting boys he seemed to be taking an undue amount of time in his preliminary efforts. At last, however, he sighted the rifle to his satisfaction and pulled the trigger.

An expression of disgust escaped his lips as soon as he became aware of the result of his shot. "Missed!" he muttered. "I'll load her up again an' have Tim or Jim Paget shoot. Neither can do any worse than I did."

The boys, meanwhile had leaped to the porthole

and were peering eagerly at the wharf. It was obvious that no one there had fallen, although the men were aware of the shot that had been fired. They were dodging about the place and after a hasty effort to discover the direction from which the bullet had come, for it had lodged in a plank, all six men turned, and, running swiftly from the wharf, speedily disappeared from sight.

"The' was just tryin' toe draw yore fire," said Tim boldly. "There wasn't 'nough o' 'em on the old wharf toe give yo' much o' a mark. I reckon all the' wanted was toe get yo' toe shoot an' then the' left the rest toe th' men the've stood along th' shore."

"Maybe so," acknowledged the colonel.

"What yo' goin' toe do 'bout it?"

"First off I'm goin' toe have all three o' yo' boys keep a lookout through all three o' th' portholes. If yo' see a sign o' a man moving anywhere 'round these parts let me know. I want toe try that fo' 'bout an hour an' then I'll tell yo' what toe do next."

Instantly the three boys took their positions as indicated and for a time were keenly watching the adjacent swamp. When the minutes slowly passed, however, and not a sign of the presence of any of their enemies was seen the task became monotonous.

At last Tim said, "We haven't seen hide nor hair o' a Tory, pop."

Colonel Bludworth was silent a brief time before he said, "Yo' all want toe know what I'm plannin' toe do next?"

"Yas, suh."

"I'm a-goin' toe tell yo'. I reckon I'll take one o' th' lighter guns an' go down toe th' swamp a spell."

"What for?"

"I'll just wander like up 'long Nigger Head Point an' maybe I'll run across some game. I've seen good shootin' in these here parts befo'."

"Let Jim Paget or me go in yore place," pleaded Tim. "Yo' all are needed here toe fire Old Bess. S'pose some one comes chasin' us right up toe th' hole in th' ground, th' only way we all could get away would be toe have a good shot toe pick 'em off."

"No, suh, I'm a-goin' myself," declared the colonel stubbornly.

"Then let Jim Paget or me go 'long with yo'."

Colonel Bludworth hesitated a moment and then said, "Not this time. I'm a-goin' out toe see what's goin' on. I reckon some doggone Tory is a-waitin' fo' me out there somewhere an' it would be a pity toe dis'point him. I reckon there'll be plenty o' chances for yo' boys toe go huntin' befo' we get clean away from Nigger Head Point, so yo' all just hold yore horses an' keep a good watch while I'm gone. It may be yo'll have toe fight off some Tory a-chasin' me

like Tim said. If any one does, let him have Old Bess. I reckon any one o' yo' can shoot well enough toe do that for me. But keep a mighty sharp lookout all the while."

Colonel Bludworth, at once selecting a light gun, was speedily lowered at his insistent demand, and disappeared from sight. The feeling of anxiety was keen in the hearts of the three boys when they were aware that they had been left behind. Each one endeavored to maintain an appearance of confidence which he was far from feeling but each was aware of the fears of his companions.

They had taken their places at the portholes in obedience to the directions of the colonel and for a time as they peered out at the adjacent region no one spoke.

Tim Bludworth, who seldom was able to be silent long, soon turned to Jim Paget, saying, "D' yo' really think that was a trick o' those Tories?"

"Yas, suh, I reckon it was."

"What made pop go then?"

"He said he wanted toe find out what was goin' on."

"I'm afeared he'll find it," muttered Tim, as he once more turned to his point of observation. "I reckon those doggone Tories'll get him as shore's yo're born."

"D' yo' know in which direction he went?"

"No, suh, I haven't seen him since he left here. Maybe he's in th' tunnel right now."

"He's out o' there by now. He said he was goin' out on th' Point."

"I don't see what fo' he wanted toe go anyway. I'm feared for him."

"Don't yo' all be scared, Tim. I reckon th' colonel won't get lost."

Somewhat comforted by the confidence of his friend, Tim resumed his watch. The moments passed slowly and there apparently was nothing to increase the anxiety of the boys. Once Lige reported that he had discovered a boat coming up the creek, but a close inspection proved that he had mistaken a bush for a skiff.

A half hour later, however, Jim Paget, who was stationed at the porthole through which the view of Wilmington was to be had, suddenly exclaimed in a loud whisper, "Come here, Tim! Be quick!"

"What is it? What yo' see?" inquired Tim, as he instantly advanced to the side of his friend and looked out through the porthole.

"Look off there toe yore right," directed Jim Paget. "What do yo' see?"

"I don't see anything out o' th' way."

"Look again. Right in th' line o' that gum tree. Just wait a minute if yo' don't see it first off. Yo'll shore see——"

"I see it! I see it!" Tim broke in excitedly. "There's somethin' movin' there as shore as yo're born! What d' yo' reckon 'tis?"

"Look right at it!"

"I am a-lookin' at it. It's three men; that's what 'tis."

"That's right. Now watch 'em an' see which way the're headin' for."

"The're comin' here!"

"Can't tell yet awhile. Looks toe me's if the' was workin' on a plan toe head off th' colonel by gettin' between him an' this tree."

"Yo' think the' 'spect th' tree?"

"I dunno 'bout that. 'Twouldn't be surprisin'. We've got toe watch 'em ev'ry minute. 'Twon't do toe fire at 'em, leastwise unless we have toe."

"We've got toe keep our eyes on 'em."

"We have shore 'nough," assented Jim Paget.

Both boys became silent as they watched the actions of the three men they had discovered in the swamp. The fear that their hiding place was now known was soon dispelled for the men evidently were not coming toward it.

What their presence implied was not yet clear, nor did their actions at first reveal their purpose in coming. They were keeping closely together and advancing in single file. Occasionally they stopped to look about them, but speedily resumed their advance, leaping from one hummock to another and frequently stopping to drive away the mosquitoes that settled over them in clouds.

"The're not comin' here," whispered Tim at last.

"Doesn't look so, just now. Maybe the're goin' on an' come back toe us on' th' other side."

"Like 'nough."

"I'd like toe send a bullet over there. The'd jump 'round livelier 'n the' do now."

"The're lively 'nough. The're puttin' for the creek."

"Yas, suh, the' be."

"If the' do the'll head off pop."

"I'm afraid so. We can't do anything toe head 'em off."

"We can't? Why can't we?"

"If we should try it the'd find us befo' the' did th' colonel. The'd get us an' we wouldn't be able toe give him any warnin'."

"I'm goin' toe try it," declared Tim quickly.

"Goin' toe try *what?*"

"Toe get in between 'em an' pop. He's got toe get word that th' doggone Tories are on his trail. It doesn't look's if the' s'pected anything wrong 'bout th' old cypress an' so the' won't be comin' here yet awhile. But if the' get track o' pop an' then get in between him an' th' tree, the' won't have a bit o' trouble in headin' him off. I've just got toe get word toe him o' his danger."

Jim Paget, in spite of the fact that he was two years younger than his friend, was, nevertheless, the leading spirit. His anxiety for the safety of Colonel Bludworth was as keen as that of Tim and for a moment he was almost tempted to go and leave Tim as the watch at the old cypress. Aware, however, as he looked into Tim's face of the eager-

ness of the boy to undertake the task, he made no protest.

"I reckon yo' better go," he said thoughtfully. "Maybe yo' can find th' colonel an' let him know th' Tories are after him. If they should spy yo' before the' get sight o' th' colonel yo'll have toe look out. Maybe yo'd better put straight back here, though yo' want toe look out yo' don't bring th' Tories with yo'. Remember this is th' only place th' colonel has got toe hide in."

"I know," answered Tim, as he prepared to depart. "I wish we had Sim Miller back in Wilmington safe an' sound. 'Twould be a good load off our backs."

"Sim's all right," said Jim Paget glibly. "Th' ones yo' all want toe look after are yore pop an' yo'self. Never mind 'bout th' rest o' us."

Tim at once prepared to depart. With many misgivings the cobbler protested but the lad was determined. He was convinced that his father was in peril and must be warned. He himself was the only one to warn him.

In a brief time Tim had selected a rifle and then was lowered by his comrades to the ground. He quickly disappeared from sight and then Jim Paget rushed to the porthole to discover what the approaching men were doing. The sight upon which he looked was one that instantly aroused him. For a moment he stared almost blankly down at the swamp below him and then abruptly turned to Lige.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SURPRISE OF JOHN CASLER

NOT more than forty yards from the old cypress stood John Casler. The Tory had approached the place where he was standing from the side opposite the hole in the ground and consequently had not discovered the many footprints about the entrance. He was motionless, gazing about him and frequently looking at the high tree which overtopped all the region. Apparently he was suspicious of the locality but as yet had not seen anything that convinced him that he had found the hiding place of the man or men who had fired the mysterious shots into the assembly of Tories on Market Wharf.

Startled as Jim Paget was by the discovery of the presence of his enemy, he was speedily convinced that the man had no certain knowledge of the place of refuge in the cypress. He was merely inspecting the region, just as doubtless others were doing all along the shore. The Tory, however, was so near and the possibility of his learning the truth was so great that the bound boy was greatly alarmed.

For a moment he was tempted to use Old Bess. Her voice was one to heed. But the peril would

be increased by the report of the gun if others were near, and the very fact that Colonel Bludworth and Tim had gone to find out what the presence of the men that they had seen might mean, also caused him to hesitate. If the colonel should be cut off from a return to the cypress or Tim should be seen by John Casler or his companions, the peril of both would be greatly increased by a shot from the fortress in the treetop.

These thoughts had flashed through the mind of Jim Paget before he summoned Lige to join him. Sim Miller was staring at the boys and plainly alarmed, although he had not seen the sight which had startled the bound boy.

"We must watch that man," whispered Jim Paget to Lige when the latter stepped forward and in obedience to a signal had looked and had seen the Tory. "If he comes to th' tree we'll have toe shoot an' take our chances."

"He's er comin'!" whispered Lige in great excitement. "He's er comin' this way!"

Jim Paget quickly was aware that the Tory was indeed approaching. John Casler had leaped from one hummock to another and seemed about to include the old tree in his closer investigation. The moment was critical and demanded prompt action. The bound boy's freckled face was pale but there was an expression of determination about his lips that gave evidence that he was not yet ready to give up.

"Yo' an' Sim Miller must lower me toe th'

ground," he said quickly. "Yas, yo' all come too, Lige," he added. "I'll take a gun an' a rope."

"Wha' we all goin' toe do?" demanded Lige whose excitement now was keen.

"If that doggone Tory tries toe come into th' tunnel we'll rope him or shoot him. We'll just have toe do it, Lige. If we don't he'll get us an' maybe the colonel an' Tim, too. Yas, suh, we'll have toe do it an' do it right soon."

John Casler now was without question approaching the tree. Swiftly Jim Paget selected a gun and a rope and then bidding Lige to follow him as soon as the long rope had been drawn up, he quickly was lowered.

Delaying at the base of the tree only long enough to fashion a noose in the rope he was carrying, he quickly crawled into the tunnel and moved rapidly toward the exit.

When he arrived there he cautiously crawled out and without rising lifted his head and looked about him. Not more than ten feet distant stood John Casler but fortunately his back was turned at the moment and the Tory was looking toward Wilmington.

Instantly Jim Paget drew backward into the tunnel, stopping when his body was hidden and yet he was able to see what was taking place directly before him. He saw the Tory turn and stoop to examine the footprints he found and then look up to the top of the old cypress tree.

An exclamation of satisfaction at his discovery

escaped him and then he bent low to peer into the hole in the ground.

At that moment Jim Paget became aware that Lige had come and was directly behind him in the tunnel. It was impossible for any one to pass him, for the tunnel was small, as we know, but the knowledge that help was near if help should be needed strengthened the bound boy's courage and he again was excitedly watching the Tory.

Apparently convinced by his inspection that he had found the place he had been seeking, John Casler arose and looked again at the tall cypress. He seemed to have no fear, for he made no effort to conceal himself. He drew forth a pipe from his pocket which he filled and then prepared to light it by his flint and tinder. His back was now toward the hole in the ground and he was bending low in order to shelter the spark from the gentle breeze which was blowing.

Acting instantly, Jim Paget, drawing his rope with him, crept forth from the tunnel. Somehow his movements reminded him of the crawling snake he had killed that day when Tim had first told him of the plan of the Tories to meet in Wilmington. There was no time, however, to think of snakes and he crawled out upon the moist ground. The Tory was still busied in his task and as Jim Paget's movements were noiseless he apparently was not alarmed.

The bound boy cautiously advanced three steps. He was not aware that Lige already had crawled

out from the tunnel and was following him. At that moment John Casler succeeded in lighting his pipe and as he drew himself up to his full length Jim Paget instantly flung his noose.

Startled by the unexpected attack, John Casler discovered the presence of his enemy and with an exclamation of rage leaped toward him. But the lad was prepared for this action and, instantly jumping behind a small tree, he obtained a purchase on his rope and began to pull. At the same time he shouted "Lige! Lige! Come and help me."

The negro boy instantly responded and, agile as a monkey, he leaped upon the back of the Tory and brought him to the ground. At the same moment Jim Paget exerted all his strength in his pull upon the rope with the result that the Tory was desperately trying to free himself from the tightening pull of the noose. The struggle was violent for a time as John Casler, gasping and doing his utmost to free himself and at the same time striking and kicking at the negro boy who clung desperately to him throughout the contest, tried to tear away the encircling rope. Jim Paget pulled upon the rope until the head of the Tory was drawn forward. John Casler was directing all his efforts toward an attempt to save himself from the steadily tightening noose.

His efforts, however, were largely thwarted by Lige. The black boy pulled at his arms and threw himself before the Tory, who was now prostrate

on the ground. His face was purple and his breathing difficult and loud.

"We got him," gasped Lige. "We shore got him!"

There was no question in the mind of Jim Paget concerning the truth of the black boy's statement. He was not at all certain, however, what they could do next, now that they had the Tory in their power.

The problem was unexpectedly solved, however, by the sudden appearance of Colonel Bludworth who was returning to the fortress in the treetop. For an instant he gazed in astonishment at the two boys and their helpless victim and then, instantly aware of what was occurring, he sprang forward as he said, "Hold him tight, boys! Hold him tight! Just a minute!"

Deftly the colonel relieved the prostrate Tory of his weapons and then as soon as he was convinced that the man was harmless, he said, "Let go th' rope, Jim Paget. Lige, yo' let him up."

The two boys instantly obeyed and as Jim Paget relaxed his hold upon the rope, the colonel said to the fallen man, "Get up, John Casler."

After a momentary delay the Tory staggered to his feet, his face betraying his rage and helplessness as he tore the rope from his neck and faced Colonel Bludworth. "What yo' all goin' toe do next?" he demanded.

"What shall we do, boys?" inquired the colonel,

as he looked half quizzically at his companions. "Shall we string him up for th' crows toe pick an' then leave him as a warnin' toe th' rest o' th' doggone traitors, or shall we shoot him and rid the earth once an' for all of such creatures?"

"Take him up toe th' platform," suggested Jim Paget.

"Have we got room?"

"Plenty."

"We'll have toe tie him down."

"We can do that."

"Maybe 'twould be better toe turn him loose an' let him go."

"No, suh! No, suh," protested Jim Paget quickly. "He'd have th' Tories 'round us like a lot o' yellow jackets. Th' easiest way 'd be toe shoot him an' be done with it."

" 'Twouldn't be th' best way, though. Th' thing for us toe do is to fix him so't he can't do any more harm. Either tie him up hereabout or take him up toe th' platform an' keep him there till we all're out o' this."

"I reckon yo're c'rect, boy."

Before they could act upon the suggestion John Casler suddenly sent forth a loud call for help. "Hi there, George!" he shouted, "I've found 'em! They're right here by th' big cypress——"

The Tory's shouts were abruptly terminated when Colonel Bludworth and his two companions threw themselves upon him and instantly checked his cries.

"Cut a gag!" ordered the colonel, addressing Jim Paget. "I'll hold him till yo're ready. But be smart 'bout it, son. We'll have th' doggone traitors on us right soon now."

The bound boy obediently hastened to cut a plug of wood to which he attached a narrow strip of leather. As soon as he completed his task he advanced to the colonel, who was seated astride the prostrate Tory with his hands ready to seize his throat and prevent another outcry.

Despite the struggles of the desperate victim, the gag was speedily inserted into his open mouth and the leather strings were tied fast behind his head. His hands also and his feet were securely bound and John Casler lay before the colonel a helpless man. His eyes betrayed his rage as he glowered at his captors, but he was helpless now to do them harm.

"What'll we do with him?" asked Jim Paget breathlessly. "He may have been heard an' some o' th' Tories may be here any minute."

"Yo're c'rect once more, son," replied the colonel.

"We can't take him up th' tree."

"No more we can't."

"Let's put him behind those bushes," suggested Jim Paget, pointing as he spoke to a nearby clump of blackberry bushes.

Colonel Bludworth hesitated a moment in spite of the evident need of haste. "Th' flies an' mosquitoes 'll get after him, but I dunno but that's

as bad as havin' the Tories get yo'. Take hold o' his feet and we'll swing him in," he directed.

The helpless Tory was lifted and carried to the spot that Jim Paget had suggested. John Casler was terrified now as well as angry, for he was fully aware of the fate that awaited him. Was he to be abandoned? Did his enemies plan to leave him speechless and helpless with the sole possibility of relief and release to come from his friends, who, unaware of what had befallen him, could only free him if they chanced to discover his predicament?

"Leave him an' come with me," ordered the colonel, as he hastily turned to the entrance to the tunnel.

His companions, after glancing hastily about them, at once followed and in a brief time all were once more standing on the platform, high in the interior of the great cypress. Every one now was aware of the peril confronting them. The call which John Casler had sent forth was plain evidence that his friends were not far away and that he was confident of their aid. Had they heard him? The question was vital. Even if they did not discover the Tory, there was slight question that they would see the many footprints in the mud about the entrance, and the discovery would instantly provide a fresh incentive for renewed efforts to locate the men who had fired the mysterious rifle and it would not be long before they naturally would find the hiding place. Then

fire and smoke would aid them and the plight of Colonel Bludworth and his companions would be desperate.

Besides, Tim had not yet returned to the cypress. His absence provided an additional anxiety. It now was evident that the Tories were near the hiding place and the lad's difficulty in regaining the refuge was increasing with every passing moment.

At the colonel's suggestion the boys and Sim Miller took their positions at the portholes and peered out, eager to see if Tim was near or any of the Tories had heard John Casler's frantic call for help.

The moments dragged on and not a sign of the presence of their enemies did they discover. The sun sank lower in the western sky; night would soon be approaching. The waste of swamp land was still unbroken by the sight of any creeping Tories.

"Beats all," muttered Colonel Bludworth. "I'm beginnin' toe s'pect th' doggone traitors have got Tim. Th' lad would have been back afore this if somethin' hadn't happened toe him."

"Yo' can't tell," suggested Jim Paget. "Tim may be er watchin' th' Tories. He doesn't give up th' first time tryin'."

"Yo're c'rect, son," answered the colonel, visibly relieved by the suggestion of the bound boy. " 'Pears like that boy never did know how toe quit. I rec'lect th' time when I walloped him fo'

not takin' a gun back toe th' shop an' when I got through he wasn't a foot nearer th' shop than he was when I began. That was th' last time I ever tried toe force him toe do anything when his mind was set agin it."

"Tim's all right," said Jim Paget loyally. "He's stubborn's a mule, but he doesn't get set very often less it's 'bout somethin' worth while."

"Tim's a good lad," acknowledged the colonel, "an' it may be just as yo' say. He may have got sight o' some Tory an' is er followin' him. If he is he'll hang on worse'n any houn' dog yo' ever saw."

"What 'bout John Casler?" ventured Jim Paget.

"Well, what 'bout him?" demanded the colonel sharply, as he glanced at his companion.

"Seems toe me we sorta ought toe see what he's a-doin'."

"He isn't doin' much. We fixed him so 't he'd be harmless for a spell anyway."

"That may be so," acknowledged Jim Paget, "but don't yo' all think we'd better go down an' find out how he's a-farin'? Th' flies an' mosquitoes may have been a-gettin' in their licks an' if the' have, he can't be right happy in his mind."

"I'm not a-plannin' toe make him happy."

"I know that but yo' don't want toe torture him same's yo' would a Cherokee."

Colonel Bludworth was silent a moment and then said, "I dunno but yo're right, son. Maybe

we ought toe take a look at him just toe make certain he hasn't crawled away from those berry bushes where we hid him. Who'll go see?"

"I will," spoke up Sim Miller. "I don't 'pear toe be much use here an' if yo' all will let me down I'll have a look at th' Tory. Maybe I can help some that way."

The cobbler's suggestion was promptly accepted and in a brief time they lowered him to the ground. No one had great confidence in Sim Miller's resources, but, as he had said, his presence on the platform did not add to the strength of the defense and as he as well as another could ascertain the condition of the prisoner all were agreed in permitting him to make the attempt.

"Look out he doesn't get away from yo'," warned Colonel Bludworth as Sim Miller made ready for his descent. "He'll probably try toe play some trick on yo'."

"I'll be careful," responded Sim Miller as he adjusted the rope and began his descent.

At that moment an exclamation from Lige drew the attention of the colonel and the bound boy; Sim Miller's drop was swift as they turned to heed the young negro.

Unmindful of the cobbler's fate, both sprang to the side of Lige and in obedience to his suggestion peered down at the swamp before them.

The cause of Lige's excitement was instantly manifest. Not far away they saw Tim running at his utmost speed. Behind him in swift pursuit

were two men who were striving to overtake the fleeing lad. One of them was not more than five yards behind Tim while his comrade was at an equal distance in the rear. Apparently neither of the pursuers was armed and Tim also was without his rifle. What the cause of his condition might be was not evident.

Twice the colonel raised his rifle to his shoulder, but the swift pace of the running men, in addition to the peril of hitting his boy, caused him to abandon the attempt.

"Look!" exclaimed Jim Paget in a low voice. "Tim isn't makin' fo' th' old cypress. He's headed straight fo' th' creek. What do' yo' all make o' that?"

"He's tryin' toe lead 'em away from us," said the colonel. "Doggone it! I reckon I'd better fire so't he can have half a chance."

Colonel Bludworth, however, was still fearful, and while he hesitated pursuer and pursued disappeared among the trees that grew more thickly along the shores of the muddy stream.

At that moment a signal came from below so urgent and insistent that Lige and Jim Paget quickly responded. By their united efforts they swiftly drew Sim Miller to the platform.

As the cobbler fell well-nigh exhausted upon the platform Colonel Bludworth said eagerly, "How did yo' find yore prisoner, Sim Miller?"

"He wasn't there. He's got away or somebody took him," breathlessly replied the cobbler.

CHAPTER XV

THE FLIGHT

FOR a moment Colonel Bludworth and the two boys stared blankly at Sim Miller. His words were startling and almost incredible. They were positive that they had left the Tory so securely bound that it was impossible for him to free himself. If he was gone the only probable inference was that his friends had discovered and released him. And yet it was equally unlikely that they could have found the place in which John Casler had been placed by his captors without being seen by some of the watchers in the treetop. The report of the cobbler was as difficult of explanation as it was of belief.

"Are yo' shore, Sim Miller?" inquired the colonel at last, "that yo' all found th' right spot?"

"Yas, suh. I went straight toe th' berry bushes an' he wasn't there."

"Did yo' see any signs o' his friends havin' been there?"

"Th' ground was all mashed up an' I couldn't tell which was th' new tracks. Maybe the' had come an' carried him off, but th' wasn't anything toe show what the'd done."

"Any o' th' straps or strings lyin' 'round on th' ground?"

"Not a thing."

"Beats all," said Colonel Bludworth thoughtfully. "Keep a sharp lookout, boys," he added, turning to his companions. "I'm goin' down toe have a look at th' spot myself."

At his bidding the colonel was speedily lowered to the ground and then the two boys at once resumed their places at the portholes, Sim Miller also joining in the task.

In the approaching twilight many of the bushes and trees assumed fantastic shapes and several times Jim Paget mistook a waving branch for the figure of a moving man. He was deeply concerned over the missing Tim, who to the bound boy had been like a brother. That Tim now might be in the hands of the angry Tories, who doubtless were enraged over the shots of Old Bess, was disheartening. He looked eagerly in every direction, hoping to discover his friend approaching the cypress. The fact that when last seen he had been madly fleeing from two pursuing Tories was alarming, for if Tim had evaded the men doubtless long before this time he would have made his way back through the swamp.

Jim Paget's meditations were interrupted by a signal from below. In response to it he joined in hauling the colonel up to the platform.

"Seen anything or anybody?" instantly demanded Colonel Bludworth.

"Nothin'," answered Jim Paget.

"No sign o' Tim?"

The bound boy shook his head. "I'm afraid they got him," he said simply.

"Tim'll take care o' himself," declared the colonel.

Whether he believed his statement or was talking to keep up his courage was not clear to the troubled boy. "Did yo' find out anything more 'bout John Casler?" he inquired.

"Not a thing. It's just as Sim Miller said. John Casler's gone, body and breeches. It looks like the ground had opened an' swallowed him or he had gone up on wings an' flew away."

"What are we toe do next?"

"That's what we've got toe d'cide. What do yo' all think's the best thing toe do?"

"I think we ought toe get out o' here right soon."

"How'll we all go? Shall we try toe get out together or shall we go one by one?"

"Th' main thing is toe get out. Th' Tories'll be back here to-night shore's yo're born. John Casler'll be ready fo' 'most anything, he'll be so mad, an' he'll bring a gang with him. Th' isn't anything left fo' us but toe get out an' be quick 'bout it, too!"

"What about Tim?"

"Yo' say he'll look after himself. I'm not's shore's yo' be 'bout that. I don't want toe leave

him in trouble. I'm mighty shore he wouldn't do that if things were turned 'round."

" 'Course he wouldn't," assented the colonel. "Now I've thought this out an' got a plan."

"What is it?" asked the bound boy eagerly.

"We'll wait till it's dark or leastwise darker'n it is now an' leave the old cypress one by one. Leastwise that's what yo' all'll do, for I'm plannin' toe look 'round a bit for Tim, before I leave Nigger Head Point."

"I'll go with yo'."

"That's all right," said the colonel, plainly moved by the bound boy's offer. "I've got other things for yo' all toe do though, an' I reckon yo'll be right busy with 'em, too."

"But I want toe help Tim. I'm not goin' toe leave him here for John Casler an' th' rest o' th'——"

"Yo'll have er plenty toe look after," interrupted the colonel. "Now I'm plannin' toe let Sim Miller work his way up th' shore an' trust toe luck toe find some way toe cross th' river. Think yo' all can do it?" he inquired of the cobbler.

"Yas, suh," responded Sim Miller promptly.

"So far so good. Then Lige an' Jim Paget, they'll have toe get back toe th' canoe an' put out in th' catboat in th' night. It may be yore best plan toe pole her for a mile or two an' keep close in shore for th' doggone Tories may be er watchin' out right smart from now on."

"Yo' want us toe go together?" asked Jim Paget.

"No, suh, I don't want yo' toe go together. I want yo' should go sep'rate."

"Suppose one gets toe th' canoe an' th' other doesn't?"

"Then th' one that gets there first is toe wait 'bout half an hour for th' other one an' if he doesn't show up in that time then he'd better start on alone."

"How shall we carry all this stuff?" As he spoke Jim Paget pointed to the tools and guns, the baskets and other equipment on the platform.

"Don't carry it, don't try toe take it."

"Leave it all here?"

"That's it exac'ly."

"The Tories may get it."

"Can't help that. Th' truth is I don't b'lieve th' doggone Tories know anything 'bout what we've got up in this old cypress."

"John Casler does."

"I reckon not. 'Course he s'pects there's somethin' goin' on 'round these parts, but he hasn't spied th' portholes an' I don't b'lieve any o' th' others has either."

"Maybe not," said Jim Paget dubiously.

"No 'maybe' 'bout it. The' know there's somethin' wrong hereabouts, but the' don't know where it is an' the' don't know what it is."

"It won't take very long for them toe find out

when the' come here again. An' the'll come just's shore's yo're born."

"That won't be till we are all out o' these parts. An' we're goin' toe leave right soon."

"When?"

"Just's soon's it's a bit darker. Now listen, son. We'll let Sim Miller go first. He's goin' toe strike out down 'long th' shore an' find some way toe cross th' river down b'low. Then Lige is goin' an' he'll put straight fo' th' canoe. Think yo' all can find th' place where she's hid?" he inquired of the black boy.

"Yas, suh," assented Lige.

"It'll be dark, yo' understand."

"Ah can fin' it."

"See that yo' do. After Lige has been gone 'bout five minutes then yo' all are toe start, Jim Paget. Every one is toe take his gun an' some powder an' bullets an' tha's all he's toe take. Th' great thing now is toe get back toe th' big house an' do our best toe see toe it that th' dog-gone Tories don't set th' place on fire. That'll be 'nough toe keep us busy for a spell."

"What 'bout yo' all?" asked Jim Paget. "When do yo' plan toe leave th' cypress?"

"I'll be th' last toe go. I'll wait here till yo' all have left an' then I'll set out. I want toe see that th' place is shut tight an' maybe I'll try toe cover up th' hole there where th' tunnel begins. Maybe I shan't have any time for such doin's, but if I do I'm plannin' toe keep th' doggone

Tories away from Old Bess just 's long as I can.''

''Goin' toe leave Old Bess here?''

''I dunno. She's a mighty big load toe lug through th' swamp when we're in a hurry. Yo' all'll need lighter guns, an' ones yo' can handle right smart.''

''When do we start?'' inquired Jim Paget, impatient to make the attempt now that the colonel had outlined the plan.

''We'll wait till it's darker. I'll be lookin' after things here but yo' all better keep up yore lookout. Yo' never can tell what may turn up an' we all must be ready for it whenever it comes.''

The two boys and Sim Miller obediently turned again to the portholes and resumed their tasks. In the dim light the great swamp and the river beyond seemed almost to be unreal. The occasional cry of a nightbird or the whirring sound of a bat or large insect was heard but the silence that rested upon the region was so real that to the waiting, watching boys it seemed almost to be alive.

Not a word had come from Tim Bludworth. The momentary sight of him as he was fleeing before the Tories had been abrupt and final. Whether he had been taken or had succeeded in eluding his pursuers was not known. And Jim Paget was deeply troubled over the fate of his missing friend.

An hour afterward Colonel Bludworth said, ''I reckon we might's well be startin'. It's pretty

nigh's dark as it ever will be an' we don't want toe lose any more time 'n we're obliged to."

As his companions instantly responded, the colonel said, "Sim Miller is toe go first. We'll give him a few minutes toe get away an' then Lige will start. After a bit Jim Paget will leave. Yo' all know just what yo're toe do. If any o' yo' gets sight o' th' Tories before yo' get a hundred feet away from th' old cypress put straight back here, give th' signal an' we'll haul yo' up again. I don't b'lieve yo' all'll find any o' 'em right 'round here, however, for I don't b'lieve anybody has s'picioned what we've got up here anyway. Now, Sim Miller, are yo' ready?"

The little cobbler was trembling, but he did his utmost to control himself as he said, "Yas, suh."

"Then we'll let yo' down."

In silence the rope was adjusted and then Sim Miller was lowered. In a brief time Jim Paget, who was watching at the eastern porthole, reported that he had seen him crawling from the exit and speedily disappear among the bushes.

"I reckon Sim Miller'll have th' hardest time of all," said Colonel Bludworth, thoughtfully. "He may make it all right but he'll see a good many times when he'll wish he was back with us."

"Why d' yo' let him go alone?" inquired Jim Paget.

"Th' wasn't any other way. We couldn't take him with us an' we haven't any time toe waste lookin' him up if he was toe get lost. We'll have

all we want, I reckon, lookin' out for Tim. Besides, if Sim Miller has any head he must use it, an' if he does, I reckon he'll find some way toe get across th' river."

"Won't he be likely toe run into trouble if he does get back toe Wilmington?"

"Ev'rybody's likely toe find trouble these days. I reckon it's time for Lige toe start now. We've given Sim Miller a good lead."

In response to the summons Lige promptly stepped forward, and after the colonel once more had explained to him that he was to go to the place where they had concealed the canoe and that if Jim Paget did not join him within an hour he was to move down to the catboat and there wait until morning, when, if none of the party appeared, he was to sail back up the river and report at the plantation, he was lowered as the cobbler had been before him.

Soon it was the turn of Jim Paget to descend. "Yo' know what toe do," said the colonel. "If yo' can do it I'll be mighty glad toe have you keep a lookout for Tim. I shore don't want anything toe happen toe that boy."

"Of course I shall watch out fo' him," answered the bound boy. "I reckon Tim'll need his friends."

"He shore will."

"I'll do my best."

"I don't want yo' should go out o' yore way. Th' first thing is toe get away from Nigger Head

Point, an' if yo' all get toe th' canoe with Lige, I want yo' should start right soon."

"I'll do it. Now, colonel, d' yo' think yo' can manage this rope all 'lone? If yo' don't, I'll stay by till——"

"Yo' all go straight ahead, Jim Paget," broke in Colonel Bludworth. "I reckon I'll be there at th' canoe before you'll be."

"I hope yo' will!" said the bound boy fervently, as he tested the rope and then, at the bidding of his friend, stepped from the platform and speedily was lowered to the ground.

Leaving the rope as the colonel had directed, Jim Paget at once crawled into the tunnel and soon afterward was standing on the ground near the exit. As he arose, the heavy damp smell of the swamp seemed oppressive. Flecks of mist were between him and the river. The great cypress as he glanced back at it loomed larger than ever before. It was like some giant sentinel, solitary, silent and fearless.

Jim Paget, however, was speedily recalled to the difficulties of his own task. He looked keenly about him and then stepped cautiously forward to a hummock in the path. Again he stopped and looked anxiously all about him. Not a sound broke in upon the silence of the night. The darkness seemed to be thick and dense. Morning might be at hand, but there was nothing to indicate its approach.

Once more the bound boy moved forward. For

a moment it seemed to him that he saw dark hands extended to grasp him. He was fearful that a decaying stump just before him concealed the crouching form of a Tory. He darted past and was greatly relieved when he safely passed beyond the spot.

A nervous tremor seized upon him. He wanted to shout, to call upon the colonel, who doubtless still was in the tree, to come to his aid. Only by exerting all his strength of will was he able to control himself, and then in his eagerness to be out of the region he began to run, leaping from hummock to hummock in his flight. He dared not look behind him to see if he was pursued. What was ahead was uncertain, but at least he would see any men that might rise before him.

After he had advanced a considerable distance a measure of self-control returned to him. His eyes now were accustomed to the dim light and he no longer was fearful of every fallen tree or clump of bushes as being the hiding place of his foes. He was still alert and watchful, but the terror that had been upon him was almost gone.

At last he stopped to try to get his bearings. From the place where he was standing he saw the waters of the Cape Fear River not far away. The light was sufficient to enable him to see the occasional shimmering and a feeling of fresh security stole over him. If he could succeed in getting the catboat out upon the river he was hopeful that he might pole the little craft up-

stream, keeping close to the shore and protected by the bushes that grew along the banks.

The suggestion provided a fresh inspiration and resolutely he resumed his flight. The ground over which he was moving was firmer now and there was less danger of slipping or falling into the deep mud on either side of the pathway he was following. As he moved forward the character of the ground changed still more. It was becoming more firm. There were frequent places too where there were stretches of solid earth on which bushes or young trees were firmly growing.

Just before him was such a growth on a slight elevation that covered at least a hundred and fifty square feet. For some reason which he could not explain Jim Paget abruptly turned from his pathway to the higher ground. He did not stop to consider the motive which led him on, perhaps the sole reason for the change being the desire to gain the slight eminence and there obtain a wider vision of the surrounding region.

Thus far he had not been molested nor had he seen anything that indicated a near-by peril. The bound boy, although he now had recovered his self-control, was fully aware of the dangers that might be lurking between him and the place where he had hidden the canoe, and he was eager to discover if possible what these were. The slightly elevated land provided a point of observation and he decided at once to take advantage of it.

He moved forward cautiously, crouching and holding his rifle in his right hand. He parted the bushes and entered.

For a moment he had a vision of the huge snake he had killed on the day when Tim had overheard the plottings of the Tories. Perhaps now he might step upon a nest of the reptiles. The thought was not reassuring but Jim Paget resolutely advanced and then stopped abruptly as he discovered that the interior of the place was bare of trees and bushes. Almost as if the ground had been cleared by men, it seemed to suggest a circular meeting place.

In a moment, however, the bound boy stopped motionless as he gazed in alarm at a man that was standing with his back turned toward him, only a few yards away. He saw that he was armed and was standing, leaning upon his gun whose butt was resting upon the ground.

Jim Paget's heart was beating violently as he waited to discover whether or not the man was aware of his approach. He had not avoided all noise as he had thrust aside the branches that impeded his approach and the guard might easily have heard him. A brief period of intense silence convinced Jim Paget that his coming was not known, and he waited breathlessly to ascertain what the purpose of the man in guarding the spot might be. To all appearances, the armed guard was listless and not fearful of any immediate

danger. Jim Paget heard him yawn several times and his attitude certainly was not that of one who was interested in his task.

Suddenly the man spoke. Startled by the unexpected sound, the bound boy's first fear was that his presence now was known. He experienced a sense of relief when it became evident that the guard was addressing some one in front of him.

Leaning forward, Jim Paget for a brief time was unable to perceive any other person. In a brief time, however, he made out the body of a man lying on the ground a few feet beyond the guard. Why he should be there and in such a position was not manifest.

Jim Paget, however, was quickly devoting his attention to the guard. Yawning and extending his arms, the man said, "I reckon yo' all have got th' best o' it. All yo' have toe do is toe lie thar an' sleep."

"If yo'll untie these ropes an' let me go," answered the prostrate man, "I'll give yo' my place an' yo' can go toe sleep yoreself."

Jim Paget, startled by the voice, ignored the good-natured laugh of the guard. It was Tim Bludworth that had spoken and evidently he was bound and a helpless prisoner, over whom the man before him was standing guard.

CHAPTER XVI

JIM PAGET'S DISCOVERY

ALMOST overwhelmed by his discovery, Jim Paget's first impulse was to dart forward, and, aiming his rifle at the guard, demand the release of his friend. He was quickly aware, however, that such a course of action might only arouse other guards that might be near, with the result that he, too, would be a prisoner, bound and helpless as was Tim.

A moment later he cautiously withdrew from the place where he was standing, and, carefully noting the spot so that he might quickly find it again, he stole back to the indistinct pathway he had been following.

His chief purpose now was to intercept Colonel Bludworth, who doubtless had started by this time from the cypress tree. With the presence and aid of the colonel he was confident that some way of releasing Tim would be found. Perhaps, too, Jim Paget was thinking that his own courage would be greatly strengthened if the doughty warrior were present to command.

As he peered along the muddy way he was not able to see any moving creature in the great swamp. It seemed to the excited boy that morning was already at hand, and with the coming of

daylight doubtless the guard would be changed or Tim might be taken to the headquarters of the Tories. In the latter event, Jim Paget was positive he could foretell the fate of his friend.

The thought increased the desperation of the excited boy. Once more he looked eagerly all about him, but nowhere did he see the colonel. He was tempted to return and do his utmost alone to rescue his friend. Reserving that alternative to the last, he began to run back over the rough way, planning to summon Colonel Bludworth if the latter had not as yet departed from the tree.

In his eagerness Jim Paget was leaping from one dry spot to the next. Once his foot slipped and he fell face downward into the mud, but desperately regaining his upright position he resumed his flight, unmindful alike of the filth that covered him and of his now useless weapon, for he still had retained his grasp of his rifle in his fall and the gun was now wet. On and on he ran until at last the dim outlines of the giant tree loomed before him in the distance.

At that moment, however, he had a vision of an indistinct figure of a man approaching in front of him. Instantly concluding that Colonel Bludworth was coming he called, "Is that you, colonel?"

There was a brief silence as the man before him abruptly halted. "Who is calling?" he demanded in a low voice.

"Jim Paget," answered the bound boy.

"What yo' all want?"

"I want yo' yo'self an' I want yo' mighty quick an' I want yo' mighty bad."

"What's wrong?"

It was indeed Colonel Bludworth approaching and now he recognized the voice of Jim Paget.

"I've found Tim."

"Where is he?"

"Back yonder. He's a prisoner. He's all tied up and lyin' on th' ground, an' there's a guard standin' over him."

"How many guards?"

"I didn't see but one."

"Can yo' show me th' place?"

"I reckon I can," said Jim Paget eagerly. "Yo' just follow me an' I'll take yo' there in no time 'tall."

"How far is it from here?"

" 'Bout five minutes."

"Then hold yore horses a bit. Let's get this straightened out so we'll know what we're a-doin' when we begin. Now tell me all 'bout it."

"I'll tell yo'," assented Jim Paget. "But sunup'll be here right soon an' we haven't much time toe waste."

"Don't waste any," said Colonel Bludworth sternly. "Just tell me 'bout it an' stop right there with that."

Thus bidden, Jim Paget related the experience that led to his discovery of the place where Tim was bound and hidden.

"Is yore rifle workin' good?" asked the colonel hastily, when he had heard all.

"I reckon it isn't," answered the boy ruefully. "Y' see I fell intoe the mud back yonder——"

"Look out that yo' don't fall again. We won't stop now for anything. Yo' may not have much call for a gun, that is, if yo're dead shore there's only one man a-guardin' Tim."

"That's all I saw."

"One is 'nough. Come on an' don't slip again."

Instantly Jim Paget turned and led the way with the colonel close behind him.

Cautiously they advanced until Jim Paget raised his hand as a signal that they were to halt. He was not positive in the dim light that he had arrived at the place where they must turn to their right in order to gain the sheltered spot where he had found his friend, a prisoner, under guard.

"This th' place?" whispered Colonel Bludworth.

"Wait for me toe look around a bit. I think 'tis but I'm not dead shore," whispered the bound boy in reply. "Stay here an' I'll go ahead an' find out."

Jim Paget carefully held back the brush and crept into the thicker growth at the right of the rough pathway they had been following. He had a feeling of confidence now that had been lacking in his former effort. The peril of discovery still was present, however, and he advanced slowly, using extreme caution as he proceeded.

In a brief time he recognized certain familiar objects he had noted and was positive that he was correct in his statement that he had come to the place where he had heard the voice of Tim's guard.

Speedily retracing his way, he soon rejoined the colonel and reported. "Yas, suh," he said confidently, "this is th' place. We turn in here an' go 'bout seventy-five feet——"

"Yo' all stay right here," broke in the colonel.

"What yo' all goin' toe do?"

"I'm a goin' toe do a bit o' lookin' for myself. I'll be back right soon."

The colonel, without another word, advanced into the thicket and disappeared from sight. Left to himself, Jim Paget first tried to assure himself that no one was watching him. The adjacent trees were low and too small to provide shelter for any lurking Tories. The brush was heavy but it was not dense and therefore did not offer a place of concealment. Unless some one should come directly along the pathway he would not be likely to observe the silent and motionless boy.

He was aware that his rifle was useless, which fact left him defenseless. The colonel, however, was not far away and the young watcher was not without confidence. He turned frequently to the spot where the colonel had disappeared, although he did not believe he would come back soon. Naturally he would be deeply interested in what he

discovered and there even was a possibility that single-handed he would attempt to free his son. Indeed, the fact that Jim Paget did not know what was in the mind of the colonel increased his anxiety. The man was somewhat impulsive in spite of his indifferent manner and at any moment might do the most unexpected things.

At that moment the bound boy was startled as he saw a man emerging from the place where the colonel had disappeared only a few minutes before. Quickly he recognized the man as the colonel himself and he hastily stepped forward to meet him.

"Did yo' find him?" he whispered.

"I did."

"Shall we go in an' get him?"

"There's three men a-guardin' him now. I thought yo' said there was only one."

"I didn't see but one. Yo' shore there's three?"

"I saw 'em an' I heard 'em talkin' too."

"Did yo' see Tim?"

"Yas, suh."

"What shall we do if there's three? My gun is no good——"

"I don't want yore gun. I want yo'."

"Y've got me."

"I reckon I have."

"What we goin' toe do?" the lad again whispered.

"Goin' toe set Tim free."

"But yo' say there's three men a-guardin' him."

"They be."

"We can't fight three. My rifle's wet, yo' understand."

"I know all 'bout that. We're just going toe get Tim, though. I must say I'd like toe lay my hands again on that doggone traitor, John Casler. I reckon he'd know this time——"

"Is John Casler one o' th' guards?" broke in Jim Paget.

"He is."

"Armed?"

"I reckon so."

"Then I don't see how we all can——"

"Now listen, son," interrupted the colonel. "I've got a plan. I'm a-goin' toe try a trick on th' traitors. They're in there all unsuspectin'. I want yo' toe come with me an' get behind th' bushes. I want yo' should stick yore gun barrel through th' bushes an' I reckon I'll put two or three dead sticks alongside yore gun at th' proper intervals. Yo' take this pistol an' if yo' have toe, use it. I'll go ahead an' call on th' doggone traitors toe throw up their hands. Maybe I'll fire an' maybe yo' will too. Just's likely 's not yo' may have toe yell yore loudest an' I'll help too, but we won't do a thing more'n we have toe. If the' s'render all right, then I'll step up—or maybe I'll call on yo' toe do that part—an' relieve 'em all o' their guns an' other weapons."

"S'pose the' don't give up?" suggested Jim Paget.

"But the' will. I haven't had John Casler for a neighbor for nigh onto fifteen years for nothin'. I know th' breed. An' I know yo', Jim Paget, an' I know, too, that I can depend on yo'. We've just got toe get Tim out o' their hands. We just *got* to. I'm not givin' yo' many directions, I don't need toe, for I know yo' all have got some brains inside o' yore topknot. Just use 'em. Follow any lead I give, but don't do anything I don't start. We got toe work together an' we got toe keep together. Now then if yo're ready we'd better start."

"I'm ready," responded the bound boy quietly.

A faint trace of the coming dawn now appeared in the eastern sky. An occasional sound of twittering birds also indicated that day was at hand. The shadows of the trees were becoming more clearly defined and various other evidences showed plainly the necessity of haste by the colonel and his young companion.

Apparently aware of the danger of delay, both pushed forward, keeping in close touch, Jim Paget moving almost like a machine as his feet were placed in the footsteps of his predecessor as soon as the colonel stepped ahead. In a brief time they arrived at the border of the circular place within which the bound boy had discovered Tim to be a prisoner.

Jim Paget's excitement increased. The fact

that three men instead of the one he had seen guarding the prisoner were now within the circle and that without doubt all three were armed, as well as the fact that John Casler was one of the trio, increased his anxiety. And yet somehow he was not afraid, at least the fear which held him in his former approach was now gone. Doubtless the presence of Colonel Bludworth accounted in part for this condition. The colonel's calmness and confidence did much to make his young comrade less fearful.

Without speaking, Colonel Bludworth now motioned to Jim Paget to thrust the muzzle of his rifle through the shrubbery so that the barrel extended a foot or more on the side toward the men. At the same time he thrust the dead branches, which had been stripped of their twigs, through the brush, so that each extended several inches beyond the leaves. A space of two feet was left between the limbs so that in the dim light they might easily be taken for the guns of a row of kneeling men behind the bushes.

When this task had been accomplished, the colonel motioned to Jim Paget to draw his pistol and be prepared to fire it at any instant and then, apparently satisfied with what he and his companion had done, the colonel looked to the priming of his gun, glanced quickly all about him and then boldly leaped through an opening in the bushes. Instantly he brought his rifle to his shoulder, aimed it at the three men who were seated near by,

and in a low voice called, "Hands up! Every man of yo' hold up his hands! We've got yo' all surrounded and yo' all are our prisoners!"

The startled men stared blankly at the intruder and then started to reach for their guns which they had placed together on the ground.

"Stop!" ordered the colonel. "I told yo' I had yo' surrounded. If one o' yo' moves I'll have my men shoot. Yo' hear me, don't yo', sergeant?"

"We shore do," spoke up Jim Paget loudly.

The unexpected response instantly alarmed the startled men. All three glanced in the direction from which the startling response had come. In the dim light the extended dead branches, thrust through the bushes, had the appearance of rifle barrels. Plainly they were surrounded.

"Put yore hands up higher," ordered the colonel.

The three men quickly obeyed.

"Now the one nearest me stand up."

The command was instantly complied with and the man indicated staggered to his feet.

"Stand there," continued Colonel Bludworth, indicating that his prisoner was to step to one side. Satisfied with his compliance, he then ordered the second man to arise and take a position about the distance of a yard from the first man. The third man was next commanded to follow the example of his two friends and hastily obeyed, taking a position near the one that had immediately preceded him.

"Now, don't move!" said the colonel. "I've got yo' covered, an' th' first one that tries toe get away will be shot like he was a rabbit." There was a moment of tense silence before the colonel called, "Sergeant!"

"I'm here," answered Jim Paget, from behind the bushes.

"Leave yore men an' come in here."

"I'm comin'." Jim Paget stepped forward as he spoke and advanced to the side of the colonel. Even in the darkness he was positive that one of the trio standing with uplifted hands was John Casler and another was George Rippel. The third man was unknown to him.

"Take their guns!" ordered the colonel.

There was a slight stirring among the prisoners, but as Jim Paget stopped and said, "Shall I shoot?" the threatened rebellion instantly was quelled. The bound boy picked up the three rifles and placed them on the ground behind the colonel.

"So far so good. Now yo' better go back to yore men and send Tom and Toby in here. No, yo' stay. Yo'll do as well as they. Stay right here where yo' be. Now then," he added, turning to the nearest of the prisoners, "step forward!"

The man advanced, still holding his hands high above his head.

"Tie his hands an' his feet. Keep yore pistol ready."

The prisoner hesitated. As Jim Paget boldly stepped forward, holding the coil of leather straps

which the colonel had for some reason brought with him, the man sullenly gave in and the bound boy securely tied the prisoner's hands behind his back and then fastened his feet securely.

"Next gentleman will please step to the front!" commanded the colonel blandly.

Again there was a brief hesitation but the prisoner glanced apprehensively at the bushes behind which the supposed party was stationed and without a protest submitted to the binding of his hands and feet as his predecessor had done.

When Jim Paget faced the third prisoner he found himself looking into the eyes of John Casler. The latter also recognized the bound boy and even in the dim light his expression of rage was manifest. "It's one of yore low-down tricks," growled the Tory. Nevertheless he did not offer any resistance, although once Jim Paget was fearful that he was about to try to break away. If the impulse had risen in the prisoner's mind, however, it was quickly abandoned and John Casler was bound like his comrades.

"That looks good," said Colonel Bludworth as he lowered his rifle and looked at the men. "Th' next thing is toe put these rascals on their backs. The'll be a bit more comfortable that way an' I reckon we all'll be a bit easier in our minds."

"You'll pay for all this, Colonel Bludworth!" growled John Casler.

"I've got my pay already, suh," responded the colonel blandly. "I reckon I ought toe be satis-

fied when just Jim Paget an' I tied up three dog-gone Tories."

"Haven't yo' any men behind th' bushes?" demanded John Casler in surprise.

"Not one."

"An' just yo' an' that bound boy o' yore's was all the' was here?"

"I'm compelled toe say that yo're tellin' th' truth once in yore life. How does it feel, John Casler, toe say somethin' right down honest?"

"Yo'll find out 'bout that later."

The light now had become sufficiently strong to enable the men to discern one another. The three Tories were sitting erect upon the ground and the expression of chagrin on every face was clearly manifest. Only two had been in the force of their captors. The trick that had been played upon them and their own failure to perceive it until it was too late increased the rage of the prisoners. But they were helpless now, although Jim Paget stepped quickly forward and adjusted the straps that bound John Casler when he saw the latter had been straining to free his hands.

" 'Bout this time is when our prisoners are beggin' us toe search 'em," drawled Colonel Bludworth. "I reckon we'd be right mean not toe 'commodate 'em. If yo' all agree with me, Jim Paget, then I reckon we'd better begin right now."

"Yo're robbers! Yo're nothin' but low-down highway robbers!" shouted John Casler. "Just untie my hands a minute an' I'll show yo'! I'll

take one or both o' yo' if yo' all just give me half a chance! I'm not afraid o' both o' yo'! 'Twas a low-down lyin' trick yo' served on us. I'll get even with yo' if it takes me till th' crack o' doom!" The voice of the enraged Tory rose to a scream and his face was purple with rage.

"Careful, neighbor," warned the colonel. "Yore voice is gettin' pitched a bit too high."

"I don't care how high 'tis!" shouted the Tory. "I know all 'bout yore sneakin' ways. My friends'll soon be here an' they'll take a hand in this rumpus. Yo'll get what yo' all deserve, Colonel Bludworth, yo' an' that low-down bound boy o' yores!"

"Too bad he won't hear toe reason," said the colonel calmly, as he turned to his companion. "Better cut a plug," he directed. "We'll have toe shut off this stream o' eloquence."

"Yo' won't gag me!" yelled the Tory. "Don't yo' try it again."

"We are not goin' toe 'try' it this time, we're a-goin' toe *do* it." As he spoke Colonel Bludworth quickly advanced, and, seizing the man by his throat, compelled him to open his mouth while Jim Paget deftly inserted the gag he had hastily cut. He then drew the cord tightly about John Casler's head. In a moment the furious Tory was speechless as well as helpless.

"Strange some folks never seem toe learn how toe shut their own mouths. The' just naturally 'pear toe invite th' first man the' meet toe do th'

job for 'em. Now then, Jim Paget, we'll just go on with our searchin','' said the colonel.

Swiftly the bodies of the three men were searched, but nothing of value except three knives was found.

''It's time for us toe be goin','' said the colonel. ''I'm wonderin' whether yo'd rather have us put plugs in yore mouths, too, or whether yo' think yo' can keep 'em shut,'' he added, as he addressed the remaining prisoners. ''It d'pends on yo' selves.''

''We'll keep still,'' said George Rippel.

''I'm thinkin' yo' will,'' laughed the colonel. ''Th' only thing is whether yo' require any help in th' job.''

''We'll keep quiet.''

''I may be foolish, but I reckon I'll try it out that way. But if I hear yo' let out a yell afore noon I'll come back here an' see toe it that th' job's done right.''

Meanwhile Jim Paget had released Tim and without waiting to listen to his story, all three, at the colonel's direction, turned to depart from the place. The light of the morning sun was now creeping above the horizon and day was at hand. The peril of the colonel and the two boys was greatly increased by this fact.

Colonel Bludworth, however, just before he entered the bushes, once more turned to the helpless Tories and said, ''If we all hear yo' a callin' we'll reckon yo're needin' our presence, so if we hear

yo' we'll come,'' he added meaningly. Then without further delay he pushed aside the bushes and hastened to join the boys who already were moving swiftly toward the pathway.

CHAPTER XVII

TIM'S ATTACK

THE reaction had now come and all three were making their way swiftly over the rough pathway. The mud had dried on Jim Paget's face and body, leaving a crust that under other circumstances would have evoked the laughter of his companions. As it was, however, every one was aware of their common peril and was eager to escape from the locality.

Although no one referred to the fear in his heart, all alike were anxious. The sun now was above the tops of the trees and with every passing moment the peril increased. Tim was in advance, while Colonel Bludworth served as rear guard, and all three were keenly observant as they made their way through the great swamp.

An additional fear now urged haste. Lige had been told to take the canoe, if no one arrived by daybreak, and paddle to the place where the catboat was hidden. The morning had come and it was probable that the negro boy had obeyed orders. In that event the canoe no longer was to be had and their predicament would be still worse. Without doubt the Tories were now searching Negro Head Point. If John Casler and his two Tory friends should be found or free themselves

the zeal of the searchers would be greatly strengthened.

No one spoke of his fears, however, and the little band moved steadily and stealthily toward the cove in which they had hidden their canoe.

At last they halted and Jim Paget moved in advance of his companions to discover if Lige and the canoe were still waiting. As the bound boy thrust aside the bushes and looked at the well-known spot he was quickly aware that the negro boy and the canoe were gone.

Dismayed by his discovery, Jim Paget turned quickly and retraced his way. The expression on his face revealed his report before he spoke. The colonel said quickly, "The're gone, are the'?"

"Yas, suh."

"Nothin' toe show how long Lige waited?"

"That wouldn't do us any good anyway," spoke up Tim. "The're gone an' that's all we need toe know. Doesn't make any difference *when* they started."

"It makes a sight o' diff'rence," said the colonel calmly. "If Lige didn't start 'til late, it may be he hasn't put out intoe th' river with his catboat."

"That's so!" exclaimed Tim. "Yo' stay here an' I'll run up ahead toe see if I can find Lige or th' catboat."

"Run along, son," agreed the colonel. "Look out th' Tories don't get yo' this time. We all'll stay here where we be. If Lige hasn't started tell him toe hide th' catboat an' wait for us. We'll

join him in just a little while. Tell him toe wait there for us if it takes till t'morrow mornin'."

Tim did not wait to hear more and ran swiftly down the bank of the sluggish little inlet. The way was difficult and in places it was necessary for him to make long leaps, seizing the overhanging branches of the bushes in his efforts. In other places he was compelled to wade through deep mud, but he was determined to overtake Lige if possible, being fully aware of the plight in which the party would be left in the event of his departure. The only other way by which they could return to the plantation was to find a passage to the base of Negro Head Point and there regain the mainland. Even there they would be compelled to avoid the road and proceed through the woods and swamps. And twelve miles was a long and difficult journey to undertake under the circumstances.

Plunging, leaping, running, wading, Tim's long legs were of great value in his chase. For the time he did not think of the Tories, who doubtless were watching the entire region. Even his recent experience when he had been made a prisoner by two of the detested men was almost forgotten now in his zeal. There would be time enough to return to that event when escape from the region had been safely made.

Once the running boy did have a momentary recollection of the leaping of the two men upon him. They had concealed themselves behind two

large dead trees that stood one on each side of the pathway he had been following in his flight from the giant cypress. Without a word of warning they had suddenly sprung upon him and borne him to the ground where he was helpless in their hands. There they had securely bound his hands behind his back, and compelled him to accompany them as they led the way to the circular opening, where his feet also were bound and he was thrown upon the ground and left in the care of a guard stationed over him. Doubtless they had believed that the remaining members of the colonel's party would also soon appear and plan to capture them, as they had taken him. How his father had evaded them was still a mystery but Tim was content to wait for his story.

Without halting he continued in his flight. The hiding place of the catboat was near the shore of the river and at least a mile more must be covered before he was to be within sight of it. The rank growth shut out all vision of the adjacent region. It was almost like feeling his way in the darkness.

When we had advanced half a mile farther, he halted and climbed a tree in order to obtain a view of the river and take his bearings. Not far away the waters of the Cape Fear were shining in the early sunlight. Not a boat could he discovered on the near-by water. He did his utmost to obtain a glimpse of Lige close in shore, poling

or pushing the catboat up the stream. But even the shore did not reveal the movements of the colored boy. Not a sound nor a sight did he obtain of a human being in all the region.

Returning to the ground, Tim resumed his efforts and without another interruption at last drew near the place he was seeking.

He increased his caution as he now stealthily advanced. The ground was soft and the stagnant water was deep in many places. Occasionally he sank to his waist in the filthy mass and once he hesitated when he discovered a water snake lazily crawling up the bank. The reptile was as large as the one he had killed and boasted of to Jim Paget.

There was no time now, however, to waste in a contest with the slimy creature and Tim pushed forward with redoubled zeal.

In a brief time he arrived at the well-known spot he was seeking and instantly he was aware that the canoe was gone. The marks of Lige's footprints were visible in the mud and bending branches indicated the measures the young negro had taken in order to conceal his departure.

Dismayed by his discovery, for Tim had not been without hope that Lige had waited longer than the colonel had directed, he stood for a moment staring at the little cove. The July sun now was beating fiercely down upon the region. The day gave promise of being intensely warm. The

water was shimmering under the sunlight and the insects darting about its surface were moving in clouds.

But Lige and the canoe were gone as he had discovered and there was nothing left to be done except to follow the colonel's directions and continue on his way to the river in the vague hope that Lige might not yet have started with the catboat.

It was necessary for Tim to work his way along the bank of the shallow creek, which wound its way through the muddy swamp. The toiling lad floundered frequently in the morass and waded through the filthy waters. Occasionally he was compelled to stop for rest but the necessity of haste was strong and he soon was doing his utmost to advance.

Slowly and steadily he forged ahead and at last came near to the place he was seeking.

He now halted and listened intently. For a brief time no sound broke in upon the stillness. Another huge snake lifted its head from the surface of the water and looked curiously at the boy, but apparently convinced that it had nothing to fear, it resumed its way across the muddy stream and soon disappeared among the birches.

At that moment Tim was startled by the sound of the voices of men. Dropping instantly behind the bushes he peered through them in his efforts to see who were talking and what their presence implied. He was still unable to discern the men,

nor did he know how many were there, but he now heard their conversation distinctly.

"Where d' yo' s'pose that nigger boy went?" asked one man.

"He's gone and that's all we need to know," answered another unseen party.

"What'll th' colonel do when he finds his boat's gone?"

"I reckon th' colonel won't bother much 'bout his boat. If John Casler an' George would only come's they agreed we'd get outen these parts."

"Are yo' shore John Casler knew where this catboat was hidden?"

"Man, he's th' one that found it. Wasn't it John Casler that sent us here toe get th' colonel's catboat? Didn't he tell us toe come here an' send off the nigger boy an' then wait here till he come?"

"Yas, I reckon that was th' way of it."

"Didn't we send the boy out o' this part o' th' earth?"

"I reckon we did."

"Well, what yo' all complainin' of then, I'd like toe know?"

"I'm not complainin'. I'm just a-wonderin' why th' colonel doesn't show up."

"He'll come all right."

"But it's late an' he shore ought toe be here before this."

"John Casler'll look out for him. He can't get away from th' Point now. We've got guards all

'long th' shore an' this is th' only catboat in these parts. It's a good dozen miles up toe th' colonel's place an' he'll have to get his boat. Course, John Casler may nab him before he gets 's far as this, but if he does he'll send us word, like he 'greed toe do."

"D' yo' really think it was Colonel Bludworth that fired those shots an' broke up th' crowd ev'ry time we got t'gether there on Market Wharf?"

"I shore do."

"Where was he hid?"

"Somewhere on Nigger Head Point."

"He was pretty slick 'bout it."

"Colonel's a pretty slick article anyway. He tried his trick once too often an' now he's got toe pay th' piper like ev'ry one after he's had his dance."

"D' yo' feel sure John Casler'll get him?"

"Yas, suh. John Casler or some o' our men 'll get him an' they won't be easy with him either when they do lay hands on him."

"He fooled us a right smart time."

"He won't fool us any more."

"An' we didn't do a thing we set out toe do."

"We all aren't done yet."

"What more can we do? Th' reg'lars may leave any time."

"We'll have toe do what we can, I reckon."

"An' what'll that 'mount to? The colonel broke us up in Wilmington an' if what the' say is

so Lord Cornwallis isn't plannin' toe stay any longer in these parts."

"Where's he goin'?"

"Some say he's workin' north."

"He's been 'workin',' there's no doubt 'bout that. That doggone Yankee, Greene, has certainly kept him on th' jump. An' th' worst of it all is that th' reg'lars is all worn out an' the' haven't done any more'n we did at Wilmington when yo' get right down toe th' bottom o' it." The man spoke as if he was discouraged and under other conditions Tim would have laughed at the talk he was hearing.

Conversation ceased, but Tim was unable to see the men and was ignorant of what they were doing. It was evident from what he had heard that they were hopeful of capturing Colonel Bludworth. Tim was undecided whether he ought to retrace his way and warn his father of the plots of the Tories or remain where he was until he learned more of their immediate plans. His position was trying but if he remained he must stay where he then was.

After a brief time he decided not to leave, hopeful that he would soon learn more, especially when he thought of John Casler's predicament at the time when he had departed from the place where the Tory was lying bound and gagged.

Tim also was greatly troubled concerning the fate of Lige. He had heard the men who had taken the catboat say that they had "sent off the

nigger boy,'' but there was nothing in their words to explain what their action was. Was Lige somewhere near or did they mean that they had compelled him to flee? The implication at least was that he was not a prisoner. Quite likely, he concluded, the negro boy had simply been driven from the boat and in their confidence that they soon would have Colonel Bludworth in their power they had not cared very much where Lige went. They had the catboat and apparently that was their chief desire.

As the moments slowly passed Tim found the waiting becoming increasingly hard to bear. He was almost submerged in the filthy water, only his head and shoulders being above the surface. He was within ten feet of the men and only the bushes intervened. A slight noise on his part would instantly arouse them and he dared not move for fear his foot might slip and he would fall. The flies and mosquitoes were hovering about him and he dared not try to drive them away in his fear of doing something that might reveal his presence to his enemies.

He had not been able to determine who the men were. He had not seen either of them, and although the voice of one reminded him of some one he knew, he was not able to decide who had been speaking. There was nothing for him to do except to wait for the two men to expose their plans or for the colonel and Jim Paget to come. In the latter event if the colonel should not be over-

powered by the watching Tories, then the contest might become markedly different.

Meanwhile Tim waited, striving to possess his soul in patience. The men had become silent, except for an occasional exclamation over the bite of some especially vicious mosquito. The sun climbed higher into the heavens and the heat of its rays became steadily more intense. Even Tim with all his determination was finding it increasingly difficult to maintain his position in the mud and slime.

At last, when he felt that it was impossible for him to remain much longer, he was startled as the men before him resumed their conversation.

"I'm 'feared there's somethin' gone wrong," one of them remarked.

"What?"

"I dunno, but 'pears toe me John Casler should 'a' shown up long afore this if he's comin'. I've half a mind that somethin's happened toe him."

"Yo' don't s'pose he may be a-waitin' for some word from us, do yo'?" inquired the other.

"I dunno. Think I better start back an' look him up?"

"I reckon it might be a good plan. None o' the rebels is anywhere nigh us an' I reckon I can hold onto th' catboat. Yas, suh," he added, "I reckon yo'd better look up John Casler."

Apparently rejoiced to break up the monotony of the long waiting, the man who had made the suggestion quickly arose and without waiting for

his companion to speak swung the catboat around and leaped ashore.

"Just hand me my gun," he said as he turned again toward the boat.

His rifle was extended and as he grasped it he said, "I reckon yo're safe an' sound. Nobody can see yo' an' th' rebels is not likely toe give yo' any trouble. The're too busy lookin' after their own affairs. If John Casler could only get hold o' Colonel Bludworth we'd be ready toe go back toe our places an' settle down. He 'pears toe be 'bout th' only one that stirs up much trouble."

"Yo' find John Casler," said the second man. "If yo' all don't find him an' come back here later on an' find th' catboat's gone yo'll know why. We shan't wait for anybody after John Casler gets here. If yo' don't happen toe be with him yo'll be left b'hind. Yo' understand that, don't yo'?"

"Yas, suh. I reckon I'll have toe look after m'self. I'll be on hand."

Tim waited until the man had disappeared and then cautiously lifted his head as he tried to look into the catboat. A suggestion had just occurred to him and in his zeal he was eager to test it. It might be possible, now that only one man was left in the boat and no one was likely to come for a little while, that he might regain possession of it. The thought was stirring and certainly was worthy of a trial.

Without knowing just what he would do Tim slowly pulled himself ahead. He was moving by inches, cautiously pushing aside the branches as he crawled forward. Any noise now would arouse the Tory, who doubtless would be keenly on his guard. At last Tim gained ground that was slightly stronger.

He was lying upon his stomach crawling like the great snake he had killed. As he slightly lifted his head he saw the Tory sitting on the gunwale with his back toward him. Resting against the gunwale, at his side and only a few inches away, was his rifle, the barrel of which was projected above the boat.

The sight was tempting. Unsuspicious of any threatening danger from that side the man was watching the opposite shore and impatiently awaiting the coming of John Casler. Tim quickly decided that his opportunity had come. Slowly he arose and crouched for a spring. He now was only five feet behind the man, who had dropped his head upon his hands and was leaning forward.

Suddenly Tim jumped. He seized the unsuspecting Tory by his shoulders and by a supreme effort pulled him over backward into the muddy water.

An exclamation of terror escaped the Tory; then he sank.

Without waiting to ascertain what the next move of the man would be, Tim hastily scrambled on board, seized the rifle, and looking quickly at the

priming, brought the weapon to his shoulder and stood watching the Tory who now was floundering in the mud in his efforts to regain his footing.

"Stop right where yo' be!" ordered Tim as the Tory turned to the boat. "If yo' come a foot nearer I'll shoot," he added, as the man apparently disregarded the boy's command.

"Who might you be?" demanded the Tory, as he abruptly halted. There was something in the expression of his youthful opponent that served to make him more cautious.

"I might be the Prince o' Whales, but I'm not," retorted Tim. "Just now I'm th' admiral o' this fleet an' I won't stand any nonsense from any doggone Tories. The're all traitors anyway."

"What yo' all intendin' toe do?"

"I'm intendin' toe take this catboat. It belongs toe me an' what's mine 's my own."

The Tory stared blankly at the lad for a moment and then said, "Be yo' one o' Colonel Bludworth's gang?"

"I dunno's he's got any 'gang.' This boat belongs toe me an' I'm just takin' my own property."

Tim still was holding the rifle at his shoulder, for he was fearful that the Tory might spring upon him. The man was standing up to his waist in the muddy water and was only five feet from the boat. The lad was aware that his enemy was a powerful man and that in a hand-to-hand contest he would be no match for him. His sole hope

of safety depended upon keeping him at a distance. How he was to cast off and pole the boat down the stream and out into the river and at the same time prevent his enemy from attacking him or climbing on board was a problem that seemed well nigh impossible to solve.

"Why don't yo' take yore boat if it b'longs toe yo'?" sneered the Tory.

"I'm just waitin' for the colonel toe come," said Tim quietly.

"What's that?"

"It's just as I told yo'. I'm waitin' for th' colonel toe come."

"I reckon yo'll wait a right good spell."

"Maybe so."

"Th' colonel's been took."

"Has he?" said Tim blandly. "How long since yo' happened toe get him?"

"Not very long."

"I reckon not," laughed Tim, who now felt a measure of confidence returning. The possession of the rifle was greatly in his favor.

"What yo' all laughin' at?"

"I'm not laughin'. I was just thinkin' o' yore friend. He'll be a bit s'prised when he finds the colonel. I reckon th' boot'll be on th' other foot an' it'll pinch too."

"What yo' all talkin' 'bout?"

"I'm tellin' yo' what I know, what I saw with my own eyes."

"What'd yo' see?"

"Th' last time I saw John Casler he was hog-tied, foot an' hand, an' the' was a gag in his mouth."

"What's that?" demanded the Tory, plainly startled by his youthful opponent's words.

"It's just like I'm tellin' yo'," said Tim.

"Where was John Casler when yo' all saw him?"

"He was lyin' on th' ground. There was two other Tories there too. They was both tied hand and foot but neither one o' 'em was gagged."

"Who took and tied 'em?"

"I reckon yo' better see Colonel Bludworth 'bout that. Leastwise he could tell yo' more'n I can."

"Where was John Casler?" again demanded the startled Tory.

"I done told yo' he was lyin' on the ground."

"But what ground? Where was it?"

"I reckon yo' all'll have toe find that out for yoreself."

"Was it near here?"

" 'Twasn't very far away."

"Yo' reckon Colonel Bludworth might get George, too?"

"I reckon he might."

"Was the colonel alone?"

"What do' yo' think he is? A infant? No, suh, I don't mind tellin' yo' he wasn't th' only one in th' party. Yo' called it a gang, didn't yo'?"

"They're a-comin' here?"

"I reckon the'll be here 'most any time now."

The Tory hesitated. It was evident that he was greatly impressed by Tim's statements. If what the lad had said was true there plainly was a double peril. His recent companion might be taken by Colonel Bludworth's band, while even if he should escape that threatening danger, there was also the possibility that the rebels might come to the boat and as he himself was unarmed he would be unable to prevent his capture by his foes.

"If what yo're tellin' me is th' truth," he said, after a slight pause during which Tim watched him keenly, "I reckon th' best thing for me toe do is toe light out an' warn George of th' danger. I'm not afraid o' yore gettin' away with th' cat-boat," he added. "If yo' try toe pole her out toe th' river yo're likely toe find somebody right there a-waitin' for yo'. My best plan is toe leave yo' here while I go back an' tell George toe look out for th' colonel an' at th' same time find John Casler. I wonder if yo' all is a-lyin' toe me?"

"Yo' can find out right soon. No, suh, I'm not lyin'. Ev'ry word 's true 's th' Gospel."

"Then I'm goin' to try it. Don't yo' all try toe get away from here," he warned, as he clambered to the shore and soon disappeared in the woods beyond.

Tim waited only until he was convinced that the

Tory was gone, and then placing the rifle within easy reach, he at once cast off and began to pole the catboat down the sluggish stream.

He was fearful that at any moment the Tory might return. Perhaps his departure was only a ruse anyway and the man might be making a detour through the woods to fall upon him at another point.

Then, too, there was the possibility that "George" might have fallen in with other Tories and that they might come back to find that the catboat was gone. As there was only one direction in which it could go they would naturally conclude that it must be on or near the river and would do their utmost to intercept it. Besides, the Tory might have spoken truly when he said that boats were on the Cape Fear for the very purpose of intercepting any escaping rebels.

Troubled by these thoughts, Tim nevertheless steadily poled the catboat toward the river. He maintained a keen watch as he passed the bushes on the banks, but the low sound of the long oar which he was using as he drew it from the water was all he heard. Advancing cautiously and steadily, he at last arrived at the junction with the river and then ceased poling as he anxiously peered out at the waters before him.

CHAPTER XVIII

CONCLUSION

BEFORE Tim obtained a full view of the river he was startled by a low call that came from the bushes at his left.

"Hi, there!" said the unseen man. "Take me aboard yore boat."

"Who's that?" demanded Tim, startled by the unexpected hail and staring blankly at the spot from which the summons had come.

"It's Lige," replied the voice of the young negro who was still unseen.

"Good for yo'," said Tim eagerly. "Come on, Lige."

The negro boy at once thrust aside the bushes and advanced toward the boat as Tim poled it closer to the shore.

"Where did yo' all come from?" demanded Tim, as the black boy, dripping and covered with mud, swung himself on board the catboat.

"Ah been waitin' fo' yo'," answered Lige.

"How long yo' been there?"

"Since sunup. Ah did des what de colonel done tole me. Ah waited back yonder whar de canoe was an' when nobuddy comes, Ah took de c'noe an' went on toe de catboat. Den Ah waited some

mo' an' fust Ah knows 'long comes two men wha' tole me toe get away from dar. So Ah is come down yere toe wait fo' yo' or de colonel. Ah reckoned some one'd come erlong wid de boat, an' shore 'nuff dey does come. Here yo' is an' so is I."

"Did they hurt yo'?"

"No, suh. No, suh. Dey didn' hu't me. Dey des says, 'Get out, nigger!' So Ah gits out. Ah didn' leave 'em no time toe change de min's."

"Do yo' know who th' men were?"

"No, suh. Ah nebber seen 'em befo'. Dey was bofe men wha' Ah don' recomnize."

"Why did yo' go?"

"Ah reckon yo' wouldn't ask me dat if yo' all had er been dar."

"What do yo' mean?"

"Dey was bofe mighty pert in der way ob talkin'. Dey des said, 'Git out, nigger,' an' when Ah hears dem strep'rous words, Ah didn' wait toe hear no mo'. Ah des lef' an' Ah didn' look behin' me, suh. No, suh, Ah des reck'ned Ah could hear dose guns goin' blam, blam! Ah didn' wait toe say 'Good-mo'nin', gentlemen.' Ah des kicked right ober dat gun'l an' struck kerflam on my stomick in all dat mud and slipp'ry stuff. Yas, suh, Ah reckon Ah didn' wait fo' toe hear any mo'. When dey says, 'Git,' Ah des git an' dat's de truf."

The appearance of neither Tim nor Lige was prepossessing at the time, for both were covered

with mud and slime. In spite of his troubles Tim smiled as he looked at the negro boy and said, "I'm right glad yo're here, Lige."

"Yas, suh. Yas, suh," responded Lige cordially. "Ah reckoned yo' all'd be glad toe see me."

"I don't know what toe do next."

"Yas, suh. Ah reckon yo' all'll wait fo' de colonel toe come, 'long wid Jim Paget."

"They may not be able to get here at all."

Tim then briefly related what had befallen him and also told of his fears for the safety of Colonel Bludworth and the bound boy.

Lige listened intently and then said, "Ah reckon we all'd bettah des wait yere a spell. Maybe de colonel'll come, des like he said he would."

"I think myself that's th' best plan. We'll stay right here a while an' then if th' colonel doesn't come we'll be no worse off'n we are now. Can yo' see anybody on th' river, Lige?"

Both boys gazed long and earnestly up and down the Cape Fear but neither was able to discover any craft on the river.

It was nearly noon now and the heat was becoming well-nigh unbearable. The waters before them were like glass and the reflection of the sun's rays was direct and intense. Their fear that the Tories might be hiding along the shore was strong and in that event their peril was still great.

Neither had had anything to eat that morning

and both were intensely thirsty. There was no relief, however, to be had and Tim calmly pulled the catboat, which still had the canoe in tow just as the Tories had fixed it, farther under the shelter of the overhanging branches.

In the uncertainty of the coming of Colonel Bludworth, fear that the Tories had shot or taken him were in Tim's thoughts and naturally increased his anxiety. Nevertheless he did his best to possess his soul in patience. It was impossible to know where his friends were. To land was difficult or he would have stationed Lige as a lookout on the shore.

They had no means of estimating the passing of time save by the slow progress of the sun in the heavens. There were moments when to the impatient Tim the great orb seemed almost to stand motionless in the brazen sky. His thirst increased and his fears for the safety of his friends became stronger as the time dragged slowly on.

A water snake, moving lazily through the water, lifted its head as it drew near and gazed in apparent fearlessness at the boat and its occupants.

"Here, give me yo' oar," whispered Lige. "Lemme kill it."

"No."

"Why not?"

"Leave him be. We've got 'nough toe do."

" 'Pears like we all wasn't very busy," grumbled the negro.

"We don't want toe be yet awhile. What's

that?'' Tim demanded suddenly as he arose, and facing the shore behind them, listened intently. He had heard a report like the distant firing of a rifle and for a moment he was startled. The sound, however, was not repeated and Tim resumed his seat, although he was still looking in the direction from which the disquieting sound had been heard.

''Yo' don't reckon that was th' Tories firin' at th' colonel an' Jim Paget, do yo', Lige?'' he asked.

''It mought be an' den again it moughtn't,'' replied Lige.

''That's a safe way o' lookin' at it,'' remarked Tim soberly.

''Yas, suh, Ah reckons it is. Das des 'bout de way 'tis, suh.''

Conversation ceased but Tim was still anxious. He was frequently listening for a repetition of the distant report, but the silence of the summer day remained unbroken. The river was almost motionless, while the heat seemed to increase.

The stillness was abruptly broken by a call that sounded faint and far away. It seemed, however, to come from the shore and in his excitement Tim arose and listened intently.

The shout or call was repeated and Tim, now thoroughly aroused, shouted in his loudest tones. ''Here! Here we be! Come right toe th' place where th' creek flows into th' river! That's th' colonel! I'm shore it is,'' he added in a low voice,

as he turned for a moment to the black boy seated behind him.

The two boys waited for fresh hails but none came. Tim examined the priming of the rifle he had taken from the Tory, and standing in the stern of the catboat, watched the bushes along the near-by shore for any indications of the coming of Colonel Bludworth and Jim Paget.

In obedience to Tim's suggestion Lige had freed the boat and was holding an oar ready to pole the little craft in any direction and at any indication of trouble. Perplexed as Tim was, he was prepared for any emergency. If his friends showed themselves and were not pursued he planned to receive them on board and quickly withdraw from the shore, while if the Tories were in swift pursuit he was ready with his rifle to do his utmost to protect the running men.

His excitement increased as the moments passed and no one appeared. He was tempted to repeat his hail, fearful that the colonel and his young comrade might have lost the direction which his response to their call indicated. When the silence which rested over the river continued unbroken, he began to fear that his friends had been taken by the pursuing Tories. Indeed, to the troubled lad dire calamities had overtaken his father. He was on the point of going ashore to investigate when abruptly a low call came from the bushes not more than forty feet away.

"Here!" responded Tim in a low voice. "Here we are. Yo'll have toe wade a bit farther upstream. We're right under the bushes! I'll hold up an oar an' maybe yo'll see it."

He recognized instantly the voice of his father and was greatly relieved by the sound.

In a brief time Colonel Bludworth and Jim Paget appeared creeping through the brush and quickly they were taken on board, muddy and dripping as they were. The colonel was still carrying Old Bess and Jim Paget also had a rifle. Both somehow had contrived to keep their weapons dry and consequently were ensured a measure of protection. There was no opportunity for explanations or conversation now, for all were aware of the necessity for speedy action.

"Shall I pole her out, pop?" asked Tim in a low voice.

"Better pull her up th' shore a bit, son," replied the colonel. "We'll move out o' this place so that if anybody has been keepin' an eye on yo' he'll have toe move too."

In response to the suggestion all three boys grasped the overhanging branches and pulled the catboat a hundred feet or more along the shore, striving all the time to keep the little craft concealed by the bushes.

"There! I reckon that'll do for the present, son," said the colonel. "Keep her covered if yo' can an' we'll see what's goin' on." He was speaking in a low voice but Tim was assured that both

his father and Jim Paget were unharmed and consequently he was measurably content.

"What was that shot we heard, pop?" Tim asked after a brief silence, during which the little party waited to convince themselves that they still were not seen.

"John Casler," replied the colonel.

"Did he fire at yo'?"

"I reckon he called it that."

"How did he get free?"

"I dunno. He may 'a' worked loose or some one may 'a' come along an' set him free."

"I reckon that's it," said Tim. "I told some o' the Tories he was tied an' gagged back yonder——"

"Yo' did *what?*" demanded the colonel in surprise.

In response Tim briefly related what had befallen Lige and himself and explained how he had rid himself of the Tory who had not dared climb on board the catboat and yet had prevented him from poling the boat out into the stream.

"Yo' did right, son," said the colonel, when Tim had told his story. "Now then we must see what we can do toe leave these parts."

"But tell me 'bout John Casler firin' at yo'," persisted Tim. "Did yo' see him?"

"Yas, suh, we saw him. We kep' on yore trail an' 'twas just as I reckoned 'twould be. I knew our only chance was in gettin' toe th' catboat. I reckoned shore that Lige would 'a' gone an' th'

chances all were that th' catboat would be gone too."

"Did yo' fire at John Casler?"

"No, suh."

"Why not?"

"We was in a hurry," answered the colonel dryly. "We wanted toe leave those parts. An' we did."

"Good," laughed Tim. "Yo' all can tell us 'bout it later on. Think we better pull out o' here?"

"Is there any wind?"

"Mighty little."

"Let me see," said the colonel, as he thrust aside the bushes and peered out upon the river. "We're in th' lee here. There's a puff o' wind out yonder," he added, as he pointed toward the middle of the stream.

"Think we'd better make for it?

"Yas, suh, I do," answered the colonel positively. "There isn't a boat in sight anywhere. We may be takin' a chance, but if we don't do that we aren't likely toe get anywhere. Th' man that doesn't take any chances never takes anything else either."

"Shall we pole her out?" spoke up Jim Paget.

"That's right. Let her go," directed Colonel Bludworth.

The boys quickly responded and at once began to pole the catboat out into the river.

All were keenly watching the shore for the ap-

pearance of a boat of their enemy, but, when they had gone a hundred feet, fresh courage came with the perception that a slight breeze was blowing. It was only a gentle stirring of the air, but as he felt it Jim Paget said quickly, "There's a wind, colonel. Shall we hoist the sail or keep on poling? 'Tisn't very strong but we'll go faster'n we're goin' now."

"Put her up," assented the colonel. "It'll be like givin' notice toe all th' Tories on th' Cape Fear, but we'll have toe take some chances, like I said."

The boys at once shipped their oars and joined in hoisting the sail. In a brief time the task was accomplished and the little catboat began to move upstream before the slight breeze that partly filled the sail.

A feeling of confidence now returned to all. Apparently they had escaped to their boat and no enemies were in pursuit. It was more than any had dared to expect a few hours before.

"This is something like it," exclaimed Tim, as he seated himself with the tiller in his hand. "I like this better'n crawlin' through that mud an' bush an' havin' snakes stick up their heads an' call yo' names ev'ry foot o' th' way. I saw snakes in that swamp 'most 's big 's th' one Jim Paget killed th' other day back yonder in th' woods."

"Never yo' mind," exclaimed Jim Paget.

"That's right, don't mind th' snakes. What we all want toe mind are those two boats up ahead yonder."

Instantly every boy turned in the direction indicated by the colonel and all quickly were aware that two skiffs were putting out from the shore. Each boat contained four men and two in each boat were rowing. They were making much swifter progress than the little catboat and it was manifest that they were doing their utmost to intercept it.

Colonel Bludworth lifted Old Bess, which at the last moment he had decided to bring with him, and looked carefully to the priming.

"Let 'em have it!" urged Tim. "They haven't any gun that can carry more'n half as far 's she can. Yo' can keep 'em off, pop. Let her go! Give it toe 'em."

"I reckon yo're correct, son," drawled the colonel. "I don't want toe hit any o' 'em if I can help it. Th' might be neighbors o' mine, yo' understand."

"They don't feel that way 'bout their neighbors!" said Jim Paget angrily.

"No more the' don't," admitted the colonel. "But I'm not tryin' toe justify myself by gettin' on toe th' same level with those doggone Tories."

"If yo' don't do somethin' right soon, pop," urged Tim, "it'll be too late toe do anything. The'll get th' drop on yo'."

"Quite likely, son, quite likely. But just s'pose th' was friends o' ours in those two boats."

"The're Tories," declared Tim after another inspection. "I'm dead certain I can make out John Casler in the boat that's ahead."

"Be yo' certain shore o' that?"

"Yas, suh."

"Then I reckon there's no help for it. I reckon I'll have toe plug that boat first off an' give 'em somethin' toe think 'bout. Shore John Casler's in the first boat?"

"Yas, suh. Don't wait any longer, pop. The'll get us shore if yo' don't do somethin' right now."

"Just 's yo' say, son, just 's yo' say." The colonel lifted the heavy rifle, then decided to rest the muzzle on the gunwale. To the excited boys his actions seemed to be unduly deliberate. They were watching the swiftly moving boats which now were within the range of Old Bess. A few minutes more would bring them sufficiently close to permit them to use their rifles—a possibility that greatly increased the anxiety of all three boys.

Tim and Jim Paget had reached for their rifles and inspected them carefully. Lige, who held the tiller, was an expert sailor and the direction of the catboat was now in his charge. At the same time the rifle Tim had taken from the Tory that morning was loaded and placed within easy reach of the colored boy if occasion required it.

By this time Colonel Bludworth was ready to fire. "I'll try for a hole in the bow," he ex-

plained.. "I want it below th' water line an' I reckon Old Bess's bullet'll make quite a sizable hole. Maybe the'll have toe quit rowin' an' go toe bailin'——"

"Don't wait a minute longer," pleaded Jim Paget, breaking in upon the apparently easy-going man. "If yo' don't get them the'll shore get us."

The response of the colonel was a terrific report from the huge rifle. For a moment the catboat seemed to be thrown out of her course, but the boys were too eager to ascertain the effect of Colonel Bludworth's shot to give undue heed to their own surroundings.

It speedily became evident that the delay of the colonel had been more apparent than real. He had waited until he was positive that the two boats were well within range and that the damage he might inflict would be correspondingly greater. And now he had his reward when the men in the foremost boat instantly stopped rowing. It was plain that they were alarmed, although doubtless all four now were assured that at last they had ascertained the identity of the mysterious rifleman.

Soon it became apparent that the pursuing Tories were in distress. It was plain, too, that Colonel Bludworth had not missed his mark. He had planned to hit the boat in the bow and if the heavy bullet of Old Bess had plowed its way through both sides of the skiff below the water line it had left on each side a hole which was admitting a

volume of water that would keep the Tories busy bailing, even if they should be able to keep afloat.

"Yo' did it, pop!" exclaimed Tim excitedly, as he at once reloaded the huge rifle. "Give 'em one more an' the'll go straight toe the bottom o' th' Cape Fear."

The colonel did not respond. He was keenly watching the actions of his enemies and merely nodded when Jim Paget exclaimed, "That other boat is a makin' fo' th' shore. The're leaving those men toe sink or swim for themselves."

"Yas, suh, that's just what the're doin'," joined in Tim, who was watching every movement of the Tories. "The're just a-clearin' out an' leavin' 'em!"

The words of the boys were soon verified. The second boat turned abruptly and began to pull for the shore. As it headed away one of the party fired at the catboat, but the shot either went wide of its mark or fell short.

"That's a brave lot for yo'!" exclaimed Jim Paget in disgust. "What kind o' men is that toe turn tail an' leave their friends in such a hole 's that?"

"They're just plain Tories an' a Tory's a traitor," said Tim. "It doesn't make a bit o' diff'rence whether it's th' Colonies or their own friends, the' don't stand by either one!"

"I'm a-going toe let Old Bess say good-by toe 'em," said Jim Paget, as he sighted the huge rifle.

There was a momentary protest from Colonel

Bludworth, but the bound boy had fired before it was completed.

"Missed 'em!" exclaimed Lige, when the result became manifest.

"I reckon I did," admitted Jim Paget. "But I made 'em hit up their stroke a bit," he added gleefully as the efforts of the departing Tories redoubled. "I may not be much good as a shot, but I reckon I was somethin' like a whip is toe a lazy horse. Leastwise, the're a goin' good now!"

"The' shore be!" laughed Lige.

"Look at th' other boat," said Colonel Bludworth quietly. "Somethin's wrong."

"The're havin' their troubles keepin' her afloat," said Tim, as all three turned to observe the boat to which the colonel had directed their attention.

"Here, let me take th' tiller," said Colonel Bludworth, turning quickly to Lige as he spoke. Instantly changing the course of the catboat, the colonel headed her straight for the skiff which it was evident the occupants were desperately striving to keep from sinking.

The little craft was heavily loaded and if Old Bess had torn two holes in her sides, as the boys believed, then the efforts of the men would be vain.

"Yo're headin' straight for 'em, pop," exclaimed Tim.

"I shore be," admitted the colonel.

"Shall we fire at 'em?" inquired Jim Paget.

"No, suh. Look toe yore primin' an' keep yore guns in yore hands but don't shoot unless I tell yo'."

Puzzled by the actions of their leader, the three boys did as they had been bidden and then stood silently watching the Tories. There was no question in their minds now that the men were in dire distress. The boat had settled and every moment the boys expected to see it capsize.

The wind still was light and progress was correspondingly slow. Although the little catboat dragged, it steadily drew nearer the sinking skiff.

At last the colonel hailed the party in the skiff. "What's wrong with yo'?" he called.

"We're sinkin'!" shouted one of the Tories.

"Keep up yore bailin'. We all'll get yo' off."

The boys stared blankly at one another, but all were silent. It was evident now that Colonel Bludworth intended to rescue the Tories. Why should he do so? The Tories, and John Casler most of all, had done their utmost to kill the colonel. Indeed, they were in their present danger just because they had tried to prevent the party from escaping. There was no question that they would have left the men in the catboat to sink if conditions had been reversed. But Colonel Bludworth was not like other men. His actions were not to be explained, and the puzzled boys waited in silence for him to make plain his plans.

"Now, boys," said the colonel in a low voice,

"keep yore guns where the'll be handy. Don't fire unless I tell yo'." Turning to the men in the sinking skiff, he said, "I'll run alongside an' take yo' on board one at a time. If yo' all try toe jump or come all together I'll have toe leave yo', for yo'd sink both boats. Yo'll have toe be hauled on board. John Casler, yo' come first," he directed, as he cast a light line on board the skiff. "Careful," he warned. "Don't upset th' craft!"

The sail of the catboat had been taken in, leaving the boat motionless. The Tory apparently hesitated a moment, glancing uneasily at his comrades. The plight, however, was too serious to admit of delay, and firmly grasping the rope, he cautiously leaped into the water and speedily was drawn on board the catboat.

A second Tory followed, but when the third man attempted to lower himself his haste was sufficient to overturn the skiff, which now was low in the water. As a result both men were thrown into the river. There was a desperate effort to rescue them as it was at once manifest that neither could swim, and it was only by the prompt direction of the colonel and the activity of the boys that at last they were hauled safely on board.

"What yo' all goin' toe do with us?" asked John Casler, when the boys had hoisted their sail and the heavily laden little craft slowly moved forward.

"What yo' all think?" drawled the colonel.

"I reckon yo' know," answered the Tory. He was in a surly mood and it also was plain that he was alarmed.

"Yo' wait an' yo'll find out right soon, I reckon."

Conversation ceased and to all appearances Colonel Bludworth gave his undivided attention to the sailing of the catboat. A glance from him had been sufficient to cause Tim and Jim Paget to retain their guns. The Tories had lost their rifles and if they still had pistols they were rendered useless by the water through which the men had been drawn.

For a time the boat sailed on in silence except for an occasional direction which the colonel gave Lige. The breeze soon freshened and as a result the speed slightly increased, as they were sailing directly before the wind. Nearly three hours had elapsed, however, when at last they made a landing and Colonel Bludworth directed the entire party to follow him, after the boat had been made fast.

He then led the way toward the plantation. As they proceeded, the uneasiness of the Tories greatly increased. They frequently glanced at one another but they dared not offer any resistance or attempt to break away.

Their dismay was well-nigh ludicrous when after their arrival at the big house they were told they were to be fed and then would be free to go where they chose. John Casler stared unbe-

lievingly at the colonel, but he did not protest and ate ravenously.

"Yo're free toe go," said Colonel Bludworth when at last the nearly famished men left the kitchen where Aunt Judy after much grumbling and many protests had provided them with food.

The three Tories looked foolishly at one another and one of them had the grace to say, "Thank yo' kindly, colonel, for what yo' have done for us." John Casler and the third man were silent, however, and in a brief time all departed from the plantation.

"Yo' reckon John Casler'll try toe set us afire now?" inquired Tim, after the three Tories had gone.

"I dunno," drawled the colonel.

But John Casler made no further attempt to burn the place. Whether he was ashamed to do so after his treatment by Colonel Bludworth or whether the hopelessness of continuing the struggle caused him to abandon his project was not known. On the rare occasions that the Tory was seen, he had nothing to say. He kept to his own home until peace was declared and then disappeared. He had not explained to his neighbors what his plans were and consequently no one could state positively what had become of him. There were current rumors that he had gone with other Royalists to Nova Scotia, preferring, as they did, to lose their possessions in the United States pro-

vided they might live where they would be under the rule of the British King.

Meanwhile Lord Cornwallis with his troops had moved northward and established his headquarters at Yorktown in Virginia, on the peninsula between the James and York rivers. Washington, who at the time was with his troops on the shore of the Hudson River by a trick deceived General Clinton, who was in New York, and held the British general there so that he could not go to the aid of his hardly beset comrade at Yorktown.

The French fleet had arrived in Chesapeake Bay late in August and not only blocked the escape of Cornwallis by sea, but also landed French soldiers to strengthen Lafayette, who was besieging the forces of Cornwallis by land. The armies of Washington and Rochambeau now arrived and still further increased the number of troops in the siege of Yorktown.

This siege began September 30, 1781. The allied armies of the United States and France formed a half-circle in front of Yorktown. The French soldiers were clad in bright new uniforms, while the dress of the Americans was ragged and faded, and their equipment was poor. Their fighting spirit, however, was keen and the rivalry between the French and the Americans as to who was to lead in the attacks was sharp.

After three weeks of hard fighting Cornwallis found he was in a trap from which there was no escape. He made one more desperate attempt to

take his army across the York River and flee to the north, but a sudden storm arose and scattered his boats, which made his plan a failure.

Lord Cornwallis then decided that he must surrender. Accordingly, on October 19, 1781, in a large open field near Yorktown the formal surrender was made. The British troops numbering 8,000 went through the same public ceremony which they had previously imposed on the Americans when the latter had been compelled to give up Charleston. Cornwallis himself, nearly worn out by his long efforts to break the siege, sent a subordinate to make the formal surrender.

It had hardly taken place before an expedition sent from New York was on its way to the aid of the British at Yorktown. When it became known that Cornwallis had indeed surrendered, the 7,000 men in the expedition hastily returned to New York.

The allied forces then separated. The French troops remained in Virginia, while Count de Grasse sailed with his fleet for the West Indies. The American troops marched back to New York, with the exception of a detachment that went southward and recaptured Wilmington.

The long war was ended and the struggling colonies had won. It is true, as we know, that peace was not formally declared until 1783, but the fighting now had nearly ceased.

The activities of such devoted patriots as Colonel Bludworth and his young comrades were no

longer required. Bitter feelings between neighbors and those who at one time had been friends still remained, and only gradually and with the passing of years and the formation of the government of the new country, subsided.

Not a word was ever received concerning the fate of Sim Miller. All that was known was that he never was seen again in Wilmington. Jim Paget and Tim made a diligent search but their efforts were in vain. Whether the little cobbler lost his way and perished in the swamp, or was shot by the searching Tories, or had fled from the region was not known. He had simply disappeared.

For several years Jim Paget remained in Colonel Bludworth's home, where he was kindly treated and loved. After he had served his time he went with friends to the region which Daniel Boone had opened in what is now Kentucky. There he took up land and prospered as a settler and hunter.

Tim Bludworth remained with his father and as he grew older assumed charge of the plantation. His energy and labors, greater than those of his easy-going father, soon brought many changes and improvements and so he prospered beyond the dreams of the colonel.

One summer, ten years after the end of the Revolution, Jim Paget returned to visit the scenes of his boyhood. His welcome was all that he desired. Together he and Tim rode over the fa-

miliar region, recounting the experiences of the boyhood days and even going over the rough road where Jim Paget had killed the huge water snake on that eventful day when Tim first had learned of the plans of the Tories.

"The's one other place I must see before I go home," said Jim Paget one day.

"I know what 'tis," laughed Tim. "We all'll go there t'morrow."

Accordingly, early the following morning, Colonel Bludworth, Tim, Jim Paget and Lige set sail in a new catboat for Negro Head Point. They landed at the place where ten years before they had concealed their boats and then made their way over the hummocks to the giant cypress.

Their disappointment was keen when they discovered that the huge tree had fallen. The ruins were there but the tree was crushed and lay broken on the ground. Evidently a great storm had blown down the hollow tree and only a part of the trunk remained to mark the spot.

"It was a great tree," said Tim thoughtfully.

"It shore was," assented Jim Paget. "But the' was somethin' greater'n th' tree."

"What was that?"

"The mysterious rifleman that found it an' tricked th' Tories."

THE END

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